

THERE AND BACK AGAIN: A TASTE OF BOTSWANA

THERE AND BACK AGAIN: A TASTE OF BOTSWANA... ^{very} The detailed account of my debut safari to Botswana, accompanied by Dad, Peets, BB (aka the Black Bitch), Kippie, (aka the Afrispor trailer - 4 2 2 KIP GP) and Nige (aka my camera).

THE ROUTE & ITINERARY: 3,592.4KM

Honeydew, Johannesburg to Woodlands Stop Over & Lodge, Francistown - 1 night (752km)

Woodlands to Senyati Safari Camp, Kasane - 3 nights (477km)

Senyati to Kasane - Day trip (45km)

Senyati to Vic Falls - Day trip (164.4km)

Senyati to Planet Baobab, Gweta - 1 night (408km)

Planet Baobab to South Gate, Moremi Game Reserve - 3 nights (305km)

Moremi to Maun - Morning trip (198km)

South Gate to Khama Rhino Sanctuary (605km)

Khama Rhino to Honeydew, Johannesburg (638km)

Total driven: 3,860.00

Total off road: 268.00 – Chobe and Moremi



PROLOGUE:

As a 40th birthday gift, we decided to bring Candi to SA from Tenerife to celebrate here with family and friends.

We have done several bush trips that we had told her about and she wanted to experience one for herself. So, a plan was put together for me to take her and a friend on a 10-day trip to Botswana, taking in as many of the highlights as possible. I would be taking them in the Camper, we would be off road as much as possible and they would be sleeping in their own tents, me in the Camper's luxury.

Petro and I had also booked to join in the game count in Gonarezhou during the last week of October with the Botswana trip planned for mid-November. As the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry, so did our plans. When I slipped at home and tore the left quadricep tendon, requiring an operation on 9th October 2018. Gonarezhou had to be cancelled and the Botswana trip was in jeopardy. But the cancellation also meant that Petro now had leave and would therefore be able to go with to Botswana, and more importantly, drive. The Camper is manual and rather heavy to drive, and Petro was not keen on driving the Camper for 10 days, but would drive the Land Cruiser 100 Series, which was automatic and a breeze for her to drive. But what about accommodation and all the camping stuff one needs? A quick search on Google turned up a 2002 Afrispoor off road trailer with a roof top tent that folds open with an inside room, including a 90Lt fridge / freezer, at a very reasonable price. With just two weeks to get it cleaned, licensed, packed and sort out some electrics, the Botswana trip was on. Being on one leg also did not help with the preparations. After a late night finalising the last of the electrics on 16th, we hit the road just after 07:00 on Saturday 17th November.

The following is a report of the trip through Candi's eyes, her first wild camping trip, her first trip to Botswana, her first sight of a Springbok and her first... well, let her tell the rest.

Peets (aka Petro), Candi, James (aka Dads)



DAY 1 - SAT 17 NOV 2018**JOHANNESBURG (HOME) TO WOODLANDS STOP OVER & LODGE, FRANCISTOWN****DISTANCE: 752KM 06:50-18:00 (10HRS 50MIN)****TEMP: 39°C ... FELT LIKE THAT HOT AIR THAT BLASTS YOU WHEN YOU OPEN A HOT OVEN****WHAT WE SAW:****ZEBRA****SABLE****IMPALA****GIRAFFE****MOUSE****TREE SQUIRREL****GUINEAFOWL****FOAM-NEST FROG****STICK INSECT****HIGHLIGHTS:****JAMES – GETTING AWAY AT 7AM, THE TRIP IN GENERAL AND PETRO’S DRIVING.****PETRO – THE SABLE ANTELOPE AND ARRIVING IN BOTSWANA SAFE.****CANDI – BEING IN BOTSWANA.**

This is my first time doing an “off-road safari in the wild” and it’s my first time in Botswana... and I’m finally here!! I don’t think there’s anything more exciting than getting to tick off something that’s been on your bucket list for, like, forever. And I finally get to do THIS for my 40th birthday! Bring. It. On.

For as long as I can remember, I’ve wanted to do a “proper” 4x4 safari in Africa... it was never a big thing as to the destination, or destinations, and/or activities, and by that I just mean it didn’t matter where I was going or what I was going to be doing... it was about the journey... the experience. And today I started what I’m calling “There and Back Again: A Taste of Botswana”. How excited am I?! Like a kid in a sweetie shop!

Our plan: to do A LOT of driving (over 3,000 kilometers) in a very short period (10 days) and cram it with as much as we possibly can.

We spent most of the day driving, and not without incident. Mrs. Vlok (aka my Peets) was unable to concentrate - arguably, because we decided to put some music on which distracted her - and was stopped twice for speeding WELL OVER the speeding limit (100km per hour in a 60 zone). We’re still trying to figure out how she managed to get out of said fines - something around 1,600 BWP (around 120 GBP or just over 2,000 ZAR).

Crossing the border from SA into Botswana was interesting though... never seen anything like it and didn’t have a clue how it would work. To be honest, I just expected it to be the same as any European border control - handing over a passport to an officer behind a glass window and moving on, BUT... I was very WRONG. That’s not how things work in Africa. Part one: you pull up and park up at the South African side of the border, GET OUT of your vehicle and QUEUE UP (in a very long line) to have your passport stamped for exiting SA. Part two: drive over the bridge crossing the Limpopo River to then park up, AGAIN, and again GET OUT and QUEUE UP (in another long line) to pass through immigration for your entry stamp. Part three: join ANOTHER queue to pay entry, TIP, and third-party insurance (or road tax) before being allowed to enter Botswana. Now, this queue is interesting because “queue-jumpers” who think they’re not queue jumping try their luck in sneaking in front of you or sneakily join the line while no one is paying attention because said queue-jumpers were “already in the line earlier” and were not queuing up a second time since they’d “got there first”. Needless to say, a few of us kicked off and eventually these queue-jumpers were made to join the BACK OF THE LINE. Good old dadster to the rescue. Side note here: It was 44°C by the time we got back to the car. Never experienced anything like this heat.

Tonight, we’re sitting with a roaring ‘bonfire’ and braaiing some boerewors (you can’t camp and not braai boerie) while listening to the sounds of the wild. A well-deserved G&T going down nicely.

We arrived at Woodlands Stop Over & Lodge as the sun was setting, day one being pretty much complete but we’re here... in Botswana... at our first stop.

DAY 2 - SUN 18 NOV 2018**WOODLANDS STOP OVER & LODGE, FRANCISTOWN TO SENYATI SAFARI CAMP, KASANE****DISTANCE: 477KM 10:30-16:50 (6HRS 20MIN)****TEMP: 34°C ... FELT MORE LIKE 40°C****WHAT WE SAW:****ELEPHANT****GROUND HORNBILL****KUDU****ELAND****VULTURE****GIRAFFE****ELEPHANT HERDS****BUFFALO****HORNBILL****LILAC-BREASTED ROLLER****LOURIE****FORK-TAILED DRONGO****PLOVER****EGYPTIAN GEESE****SHEEP (AKA GOATS)****HIGHLIGHTS:****JAMES – ELEPHANTS ON THE ROAD SIDE AND THE WATERING HOLE AT SENYATI.****PETRO – ELEPHANTS ON THE ROAD SIDE AND CANDI HAVING A WEE IN THE BUSHES.****CANDI – SENYATI WATERING HOLE AND BUNKER.**

“Don’t be silly!!!!” This is the phrase of the day that will now be our catchphrase for the rest of time. It must be said with enthusiasm and emphasis and we’re using it to describe something that’s, in essence, just “wow” ... but for which “wow” or “amazing” just doesn’t seem quite adequate. Thanks Mommy (aka Jenny) for this one. 😊

So, today we passed a tree that we all would swear was the “FNB logo” tree. (This was one will probably only be understood by other South Africans...) Now I’m wondering which tree they used and where it might actually be...

And, yes, it was my turn to have a wee in the bushes today! Not a fun experience when they’re sitting in the car taking photos and laughing, and you’re ALSO having to check around you for SNAKES.

I fell totally in love with the elephants this evening. Not only is there a viewing deck (with booze, of course,) to watch the elephants coming to in drink and “wash” at the watering hole, but that there is also an UNDERGROUND VIEWING BUNKER (yes... I kid you not) from where you can watch the elephants at about five meters in front of you! The excitement just cannot be contained, and this is only my second night here!

Don’t. Be. Silly!!!!

We watched the elephants until it was too dark to see them anymore and although I could only hear them, a massive herd of buffalo came in for a drink, too.

Tonight, we drift off to sleep to the sound of lions roaring in the not-so-distance distance and chirps and buzzing of the great wilderness. Another magical day in the wild, under the African sun, done and dusted.



DAY 3 - MON 19 Nov 2018**SENYATI SAFARI CAMP, KASANE**

2hr Game Drive Chobe National Park

3hr Sunset Cruise on the Chobe River

DISTANCE: 44KM (INTO KASANE AND BACK)**TEMP: 37°C ... WE WERE ROASTING****WHAT WE SAW:****WARTHOGS****VULTURES****HIPPOS****BUFFALO****CROCODILES****HAMERKOP****GIRAFFE****ELEPHANT****MARSHALL EAGLE****OPEN-BILLED STORK****TAWNY EAGLE****IMPALA****CHACMA BABOONS****WATER BUCK****GIANT HERON****FISH EAGLE****BUSH PIG****JACANA****PIED KINGFISHER****BLACK-CROWN WHITE HERON****HIGHLIGHTS:****JAMES – ELEPHANTS IN THE MUD THE SUNSET CRUISE.****PETRO – ELEPHANTS IN THE MUD AND THE AFRICAN SKIMMERS ON THE CHOBE.****CANDI – ELEPHANTS IN THE MUD AND THE SUNSET CRUISE – ESPECIALLY THE HIPPOS YAWNING AND THE SUNSET.**

So, I'm petrified of snakes (and spiders), but snakes... give me the willies. Just. No. And one thing I have been most scared of is finding a snake in the tent, or worst... In. My. Sleeping. Bag. I got cold at some point in the early hours and then lay awake the rest of the night for fear of slipping into my sleeping bag and finding an unwanted guest there. My dad is still laughing...

Today we ventured into the little town of Kasane and did a short game drive in Chobe National Park. And what an incredible sight we came across.

We'd been driving along when we spotted a herd of elephants heading for the river. So, we pulled up to watch, as one would do, and "Don't. Be. Silly!!!!" These elephants were PLAYING in pools of mud along the river bed and when I say playing, I really mean playing. They were spraying themselves with mud, and throwing themselves in the mud pools, rolling around in it, like it was the best thing ever. We easily sat there for 40min watching these majestic creatures having fun in the sun... and mud... literally.

Okay, so I've seen photos a plenty of hippos with their mouths open wide or elephants doing all sorts with their trunks or... or... or... the list goes on, but nothing prepared me for seeing all those things with my own two eyes, in the wild. And while there are some really awesome photos to look back on from today, they just don't do the experience justice. It's just not possible to capture the excitement, the emotional roller coaster of awe and wonder, and the magnificent beauty of it all.

I can laugh now, but in the moment, when things got a little hairy, I wanted to poop my pants!

What happened, you ask? THIS:

First... An elephant mama gave us a warning to back away, flapping her ears and slowly walking towards the car, as we were trying to drive past the herd on our way out of the park. All we could do was reverse a little... 🐘 Then... While cruising along on the river, watching a hippo, he suddenly jumps out of the water and starts gunning for the boat. Needless to say, I think everyone on the boat pooped themselves a little watching the scene unfold. Kudos to our captain for his speedy getaway.

But, as day three draws to an end, there's nothing quite like the African sunset, and certainly no better way to end the day, than drinking sundowners on a little boat while watching the sun going down over the Chobe River. Simply magical.

DAY 4 - TUES 20 Nov 2018**SENYATI SAFARI CAMP, KASANE**

Day trip to Vic Falls: 2hr Tour of Vic Falls
3hr Elephant Safari

DISTANCE: 164.4KM 07:20-09:20 (2HRS) 18:00-20:00 (2HRS)

TEMP: 35°C ... FELT LIKE EVEN THE BREEZE THROUGH THE GAME-VIEWING VEHICLE WAS COOKING YOUR SKIN

WHAT WE SAW:**ELEPHANT****MONKEYS****BUSH BUCK – MALE AND FEMALE****WARTHOGS****BABOONS****KUDU****SPRING HARE****HIGHLIGHTS:****JAMES – THE LOOKOUT CAFÉ AND CANDI ON THE ELEPHANT.****PETRO – THE LOOKOUT CAFÉ AND VIC FALLS.****CANDI – THE LOOKOUT CAFÉ, VIC FALLS, ELEPHANT SAFARI AND THE SUNSET.**

Okay, I'm saying it: Wow. Wow. Wow. Don't. Be. Silly!!!

Vic Falls is just incredible. So, so beautiful and it wasn't even flowing at its fullest. Amazing photos of the Falls and surroundings and awesome videos of the thundering water, but you just can't capture that spray that tickles your skin as you're walking around. I must have said wow about 1,000 times and not once did the smile leave my face.

We decided to be real tourists today and were taken on the trip to Vic Falls by our guide, Tuelo, and his people carrier from Japan. So, that meant Peets wasn't driving nor was Dad back-seat driving and we could all relax and enjoy and, of course, crossing the Zim border went without a hitch. We didn't even have to queue this time.

We were taken to this gorgeous little gem called The LookOut Cafe right on the edge of one of the bends in the river and this is where we left Dad for a couple hours. Poor old Dad had to sit this one out with his "Forest Gump" leg, so it was just me and Peets on this one.

It was incredibly hot in Zimbabwe today, to the point where even the wind blowing felt like it was baking your skin. That didn't stop us from enjoying a lovely G&T and lunch at the great grand colonial Victoria Falls Hotel while watching the resident warthogs feeding on the lawn. I nearly got knocked over by the warthog mama while trying to take photos of her and her babies. She came straight for the camera.

Faced with a choice of spending the next few hours either doing a helicopter ride over the Falls, a walk with the lions or an elephant safari, it took me forever to decide, but I eventually went with the elephant safari.

So... Tucked in the back of a game-viewing vehicle I headed out of Vic Falls with three others to a private lodge to spend the afternoon with some elephants. Her name was Kariba and she was an 18-year-old African elephant. My driver was Wilfred and so full of information. I'm surprised I managed to retain all the info he threw at me on the ride.

- The matriarch looks after the herd, making all the decisions about where and when they eat and drink etc.
- A female can fall pregnant at 12 and is pregnant for 22 months before her calf (weighing 150kgs) is born.
- The bulls don't leave the herd until they're 25, at which point they head out on their own or find a group of bachelors to hang with.
- While bulls will fight each other to take the place of the next in charge, there is no fighting amongst the females. They simply just take over from one another when the matriarch dies or gets too old.
- Elephants can live to 80 years, but with passing age they lose their teeth. They die when they've lost all their teeth.
- Elephants also have a dominant side, like we are left or right-handed, and therefore will have a shorter tusk on their dominant side because that's the side they use to dig or scratch trees with.

But today a toast goes out to our wonderful guide of KGWADIRA SAFARIS. Tuelo. You are a legend!
This one's for you. Cheers.

DAY 5 - WED 21 NOV 2018**SENYATI SAFARI CAMP, KASANE TO PLANET BAOBAB, GWETA****DISTANCE: 408KM 09:35-14:36 (5HRS 1MIN)****TEMP: 32°C ... AND IT FELT COOLER****WHAT WE SAW:****ELEPHANT****FORK-TAILED DRONGO****OSTRICH****TSESSEBE****BOS KORHAAN****HORNBILL****BLACKSMITH LAPWING****VULTURE****GROUND HORNBILL****NATAL FRANCOLIN****GREEN-WINGED PYTILIA****HIGHLIGHTS:****JAMES – PLANET BAOBAB AND THE GROUND HORNBILL.****PETRO – PLANET BAOBAB AND THE GROUND HORNBILL.****CANDI – PLANET BAOBAB AND THE GROUND HORNBILL.**

Determined to watch the sunrise, and unable to figure out properly when sunrise actually is, I got up at 04:30 this morning to make sure I didn't miss it. (We've been up early every morning and it's always light, but the sunrise never seems to appear.) It's our last morning in Senyati Safari Camp before we head off to Planet Baobab and I wanted to watch the elephants coming in for their morning drink. Was also hoping to catch the lions we could hear last night (and we're told were 200m away). We could see their eyes catching the torchlight when we were looking out in the dark, but they never came any closer than the edge of the camp boundary.

The sunrise was beautiful, but still must admit that there's nothing more beautiful than the African sunset.

Have you ever seen a baby Ground Hornbill? Or a youngster, not yet fully grown? Well, today we did, and these little buggers are the funniest and ugliest things, ever. They look like funny little scarecrows running along. We had so much fun giggling over them and the pictures today!

Planet Baobab is a funky little place rather seemingly in the middle of nowhere but everything about it is cool. The "grounds" are not surprisingly dotted with Baobab aplenty and everything in the communal areas are decorated with real funk. Even the light chandeliers are made from glass beer bottles! Cool, right?! And plenty of little creatures are resident to the campsites. We have a gorgeous little squirrel roaming around and quite a few varieties of birds, especially the aptly named "banana-beaked" Hornbill. Nowhere near as big as the Ground Hornbill but probably twice as cheeky.

Not a particularly eventful day today as we spent most of it getting down to Gweta, but it's nice to have camp set up before dark for a change and be able to chill and take in our surroundings.

We did, however, come across the little Morris doing its maiden voyage from Scotland to Cape Town. Earlier in the week we met a lovely woman doing this monstrous journey on her own in honour of her dad and the dream he never got to make a reality: driving a Morris Minor through Africa.

Peets hysterically put her mouth in it this evening while having drinks at the bar earlier and had us in stitches for a little while. Long story short: in trying to demonstrate to the fah-thuh how a function on his phone's camera worked, I was taking selfies of the three of us. Not sure if it was all the driving, the fresh air or the G&T (probably the G&There) that got to her head, but Peets suddenly says – OUT LOUD – "We're doing a threesome!" Meaning, of course, the three of us are taking a selfie, but that's not at all what it sounded like. Needless to say, it's one for the history books and one not to be forgotten. I have a photograph that will forever serve as a reminder... 🤪

Tonight, I'm sitting taking in the brightly lit sky and the gorgeous, big (almost full) ball rising above us as it settles in the sky to keep a watch while we sleep.

DAY 6 - THURS 22 Nov 2018**PLANET BAOBAB, GWETA TO MAUN****DISTANCE: 206KM 09:41-12:46 (3HRS 5MIN) – LOTS OF POTHoles ALONG THIS ROAD****MAUN TO SOUTH GATE CAMP, MOREMI GAME RESERVE****DISTANCE: 99KM 15:57-17:39 (2HRS 18MIN) – 60% OF ROUTE WAS DIRT ROAD****TEMP: 37°C ... FELT LIKE IT WAS ACTUALLY IN THE MID-40S****WHAT WE SAW:****TREE SQUIRREL****NATAL FRANCOLIN****GLOSSY STARLINGS****YELLOW-BILLED HORNBILL****OSTRICH****DUIKER****BLACK EAGLE****NORTHERN BLACK KORHAAN****YELLOW-BILLED KITE****PIED CROWS****EAGLE****LEOPARD TORTOISE****DWARF MONGOOSE****ELEPHANT****HELMETED GUINEAFOWL****IMPALA****GIRAFFE****TSESSEBE****SCOPS OWL****HIGHLIGHTS:****JAMES – GETTING TO MOREMI A DAY EARLY.****PETRO – SEEING THE FAMILIARITY OF PAST VISITS, THE SCOPS OWL AND THE LEOPARD TORTOISE.****CANDI – BEING IN THE WILD WILD.**

So, I'm not sure I'll be sleeping tonight... (or I'll be bunking with the folks in their bunk) ...literally in the wild with NOTHING but a tent between us and the animals. Just an OPEN camp where anything goes. I can't even walk to the loo on my own here and if anything happens, we're diving for the confines of the BB (the Black Bitch) ... IF we can.

Heard the lions roaring and rumbling twice since setting up camp and they don't sound very far away. Don't. Be. Silly!!! Another long drive today broken up by a pit stop in Maun for a little break and a spot of lunch, too.

The road was so full of potholes we were weaving and off-roading and driving on the "wrong side" while breaking necks when we couldn't by-pass a crevice (and they literally were great big gaping holes where tar should have been) in the road! Before we left Planet Baobab, we watched a little squirrel digging in the dustbin for food and then scoffing a muffin rapper... paper and all. He had to fend off a hornbill and a francolin, too.

And along the way saw a kite sitting in the middle of the road eating roadkill... a snake well and truly dead and squished into the tar. A pretty cool sight to see.

We finally made it to Moremi Game Reserve and even managed a 40min game drive before settling down. Cute little mongoose and squirrel were running around camp when we set up and got settled in. Let's see how settled we stay tonight... under the almost-nearly full moon...



DAY 7 - FRI 23 NOV 2018**SOUTH GATE CAMP, MOREMI GAME RESERVE**

1hr Flight over the Okavango Delta from Maun

3hr Game Drive in Moremi Game Reserve

DISTANCE: 198KM (TO MAUN AND BACK)**TEMP: 34°C ... FELT MUGGY BUT A LITTLE COOLER THAN IT HAS BEEN****WHAT WE SAW:****MOUSE****HORNBILL****ELEPHANT****GIRAFFE****KUDU****BUFFALO****GLOSSY STARLINGS****GREY HORNBILL****TREE SQUIRREL****NATAL FRANCOLIN****STEENBOK****WARTHOG****ZEBRA****BLACK-BACKED JACKALS****WILDEBEEST****TSESSEBE****NAMAQUA DOVES****VULTURE****IMPALA****GUINEAFOWL****SLENDER MONGOOSE****WAHLBERG'S EAGLE****CRESTED FRANCOLIN****DOUBLE-BANDED SAND GROUSE****GROUND HORNBILL****HIGHLIGHTS:****JAMES – JUST BEING IN MOREMI.****PETRO – CHILLING IN MOREMI.****CANDI – FLIGHT OVER THE DELTA ON PAR WITH GAME DRIVE.**

So, I at least made it through the night... safe and sound and alive to continue my little tale. Going to the loo in the middle of the night was fun as the torchlight was definitely not bright enough for my liking. We had a guest in camp during the night too, but it was too dark to see what it actually was. Judging by the footprints this morning it was probably a honey badger. We were up again to see the sunrise this morning as the flight over the Delta was booked for 08:00 and I had to be there for 07:00 - so we were on the road by 05:00.

Must admit I was slightly disappointed with the flight this morning. The pilot was very non-committal in communicating with us - apart from letting us know of one sighting of elephants. It was a fantastic experience and was really cool to see the Okavango Delta by air (it even made me wonder if the helicopter ride over Vic Falls would have been better than the elephant safari – but I have no regrets) I took some pretty cool photos, but most of the time I wasn't actually sure what I was taking pics of... exactly. 🐘

The afternoon's game drive was pretty exciting and made up for the slight disappointments this morning. Saw quite a few "new" animals that we could add to the ever-increasing list of repeated sights, but we watched two elephants getting into a tiff, zebras prancing as if they'd been taught to do that (just like a horse does), a hornbill trying to feed his/her mate/child. (Most of the time I'm just guessing as to the sex here since I've not a clue which one is male or female, mate or child 🐘, especially with the birds.) We also spotted a small pack of something - probably black-backed jackal - running through the grass but all we could make out was the top of their backs. Still no lions, but we have a few more days yet.

More than half-way through the trip now, only three days left and I'm wondering if I'll even want to leave this place. It's been an incredible trip so far, creating memories that will last a lifetime.

Tonight, under the full moon, we're being lulled to sleep by lions roaring and hyenas cackling.. and they don't sound very far away.

DAY 8 - SAT 24 NOV 2018**SOUTH GATE CAMP, MOREMI GAME RESERVE**

Day Game Drive in Moremi Game Reserve

TEMP: 36°C ... FELT HELLUVA HOT AND STICKY**WHAT WE SAW:****IMPALA****OSTRICH****GLOSSY STARLING****HORNBILL****KORI BUSTED****FRANCOLIN****FRANCOLIN - RED****WHITE-BACKED VULTURE****ELEPHANT****AFRICAN WILD CAT****EAGLE****GIRAFFE****WARTHOG MALE****MAGPIE SHRIKE****BUTTERFLIES****LBJ - LITTLE BROWN JOB****LILAC-BREASTED ROLLER****STEENBOK****TSESSEBE****WILDEBEEST****PUKU****CRIMSON-BREASTED SHRIKE****OSTRICH****VULTURES****TAWNY EAGLE****SLENDER MONGOOSE****ZEBRA****BUCK****GROUND HORNBILL****WARTHOGS****WATERBUCK****LECHWE****MARABOU STORK****SADDLE-BILLED STORK****HIPPOS****BIRDS****BUFFALO****LION PRIDE****BLACK-BACKED JACKAL****WHITE-FACED DUCK****BLACK-SMITH LAPWING****EGRET****FISH EAGLE (AND HEARD ITS CALL)****CROCS****VERVET MONKEYS****KUDU****POSSIBLE HONEY BADGER IN CAMP****HIGHLIGHTS:****JAMES – WHOLE GAME DRIVE – ESPECIALLY THE AFRICAN WILD CAT, LIONS AND ELEPHANTS – AND THE CAMPFIRE.****PETRO – AFRICAN WILD CAT.****CANDI – WHOLE GAME DRIVE EXPERIENCE AND TRYING MY HAND AT 4x4'ING.**

Don't. Be. Silly!!!!

What an amazing day today. Okay, it was long and hot and, yes, we even got lost... WITH a GPS navigator. How?! Hilariously, we're still unsure. Not sure the plan was to do a whole day in the park, but it worked out that way and I even had my first taste of proper 4x4 off-roading. Was pretty damn cool!!

Saw so many new animals today, including the long-awaited lion pride of 12 and that alone was just "wow". We nearly saw a kill of a wildebeest with the help of four jackals, but the wildebeest eventually got wise and ran off before the lionesses could make their move.

More fantastic sights of elephants playing in the water, as if they've never seen the stuff before. Actually swimming and going completely under... with only the tip of the trunk sticking out. Pretty sure two were dunking each other, too. A zebra gave himself a fright when he realised there was a BABY croc watching him drinking and belted out of the water in a split second - that was an amazing scene capture on the camera! The baboon babies playing and jumping and just watching how mama baboons almost "man-handle" their infants.

Saw my first ever African wild cat, too - never seen one in real life before. To be honest... most of what we've seen on this trip have been new sights and experiences for me.

Had a little visitor in camp again tonight... as we sat around the fire. It got scared off, though, before we had a chance to even glimpse it, thanks to a very inconsiderate group of "foreign" campers from Europe.

Was quite fun (and a struggle) trying to pronounce half the names on the Moremi Game Reserve map! You have to click your tongue when making such pronunciations – much like the Xhosa do. I wonder how long it will be before I've forgotten how to say them.

Turns out we all had a reservation, or two, about this trip - thought I was the only one who had "concerns" about being on the road in a hot car with my folks for ten days and I've surprised myself for lasting this long without getting irritated. Thinking about it now, the little blow-out was funny – on all sides – but maybe we also needed it. Maybe I'm mellowing out in my old age – they definitely have!

Saw so much today and to take it all in is simply mind-blowing. It was certainly an experience spending the entire day game-driving... nearly 12 hours from start to finish. Will be sleeping soundly tonight, I'm sure, during what will be our last night at this stop.



DAY 9 - SUN 25 NOV 2018**SOUTH GATE CAMP, MOREMI GAME RESERVE TO KHAMA RHINO SANCTUARY, SEROWE****DISTANCE: 605KM 09:09-17:58 (8HRS 49MIN)****TEMP: 36°C ... FELT VERY HOT****WHAT WE SAW:****MONGOOSE****TREE SQUIRRELS****BIRDS****IMPALA****ELEPHANT****STEENBOK****RED HARTEBEEST****SPRINGBOK****WILDEBEEST****OWL****HIGHLIGHTS:****JAMES – CHOOSING THE CHALET OVER A CAMPSITE.****PETRO – SLEEPING DONKEY AND OUTSIDE ‘BATHROOM’ AT KHAMA RHINO.****CANDI – SLEEPING DONKEY AND WHOLE ROOFTOP TENT AND OUTDOOR ‘BATHROOM’ EXPERIENCE.**

Okay, listen, let's be honest here... unless you're an absolute nature geek, chances of you knowing every animal you see by sight are slim to none so I have to admit that on more than one occasion - okay, okay, almost EVERY occasion - we had to look up the type of bird or buck or animal to make sure, or determine, what we were looking at.

Somewhere along our journey today we came across some donkeys crossing the road... and one STANDING in the middle of the opposite lane FAST ASLEEP. I unfortunately wasn't quick enough with the camera to get a shot, but it's certainly a funny moment to make a note of and remember in years to come.

Another long day driving but Khama Rhino Sanctuary blew my mind. It's our last night in the wilderness that is the beautiful Botswana and we've gone all out and spending the night in a proper bed under a proper roof but get this... our "bathroom" is outside. I. Kid. You. Not. It's not a long drop, but a proper loo, and has some sort of privacy from prying eyes, but it's out in the open air with nothing over your head. The shower, too. Showering in the pitch dark by torchlight - there's no electricity out here in this campsite - was certainly interesting! And a little scary, if I'm honest. Probably the quickest shower I've ever had. Peets had to come with me and hold a little torch just so I could at least "see" what I was standing on. Snakes live out here, man! 🐍 And, just to be perfectly clear... of the twenty-something snakes that are found out here, something like only four of them AREN'T poisonous! We are currently over four hours away from the nearest hospital... (over 300kms) should we need one.

We didn't see any rhino tonight on our quick little tour to the pan, but I did see my first ever real-life springbok and THAT was pretty darn awesome.

It's just an adorable little "campsite" ... I'm just a little bit in love. Even wearing my big-girl panties tonight sleeping all by myself in the rooftop "tent". It's a beautiful starry night and I wish I could capture on the camera what I can see here. As I get snuggled in under the mozi net I've carefully tucked in around the entire bed to keep all the creepy-crawlers out, I wonder how cool it would be if this thatched roof was actually open.

PS: Okay, maybe not such big-girl panties on... have the head torch strapped in place (but off) just in case I need it tonight. Not as brave as I'd like to be...

DAY 10 - MON 26 NOV 2018

2hr Game Drive in Khama Rhino (05:58-08:00)

KHAMA RHINO SANCTUARY, SEROWE BACK TO HOME (JOHANNESBURG)**DISTANCE: 638KM 08:30-17:30 (9HRS)****TEMP: 35°C ... FELT LIKE WE WERE BAKING IN THE CAR TODAY****WHAT WE SAW:****SPRINGBOK****BIRDS****KORI BUSTED****JACKAL****WARTHOG MALE****VULTURES****GUINEAFOWL****ZEBRA****WILDEBEEST****IMPALA****ELAND****FRANCOLINS****DOVES****LOURIES****DUIKER****RHINO****OSTRICH AND BABIES****DONKEYS****GOATS****NYALA MALE****BABOONS****WARTHOGS****GIRAFFE****WILDEBEEST****SABLE****BLESBOK****ELAND****HIGHLIGHTS:****JAMES – THE RHINO AND BABY OSTRICHES.****PETRO – THE RHINO AND BABY OSTRICHES.****CANDI – THE RHINO AND BABY OSTRICHES.**

So... my "little" taste of Botswana has finally come to an end and I definitely wasn't ready to leave. Barely unpacked properly and I'm already thinking about when I can go back again.

It certainly ended on an incredible high with the sightings of rhino this morning.

We got into Khama Rhino Sanctuary too late to do a decent game drive, but we managed a quick drive to one of the pans and only saw some buck. So, our plan was to head out VERY early this morning to spend a couple hours in the park before making the long drive of the last leg of our journey back home. This was going to be our last shot at spotting the rhino here. We headed out just before 06:00 and just as we were having to make our way back to camp to pack up, and me having almost given up hope of seeing them, low and behold... Don't. Be. Silly!!!! We finally came across a mama and her baby... slowing walking along, grazing as they went. He was the cutest little thing and she had the most enormously long horn, it was crazy!

We most likely had driven straight past them when we first headed out, them probably being hidden by the dense brush. No sooner had we started back to camp when we came across a family of ostriches and their "million" babies. I've never seen baby ostriches and they were very-cute-but-oh-so-ugly with half their feathers still missing.

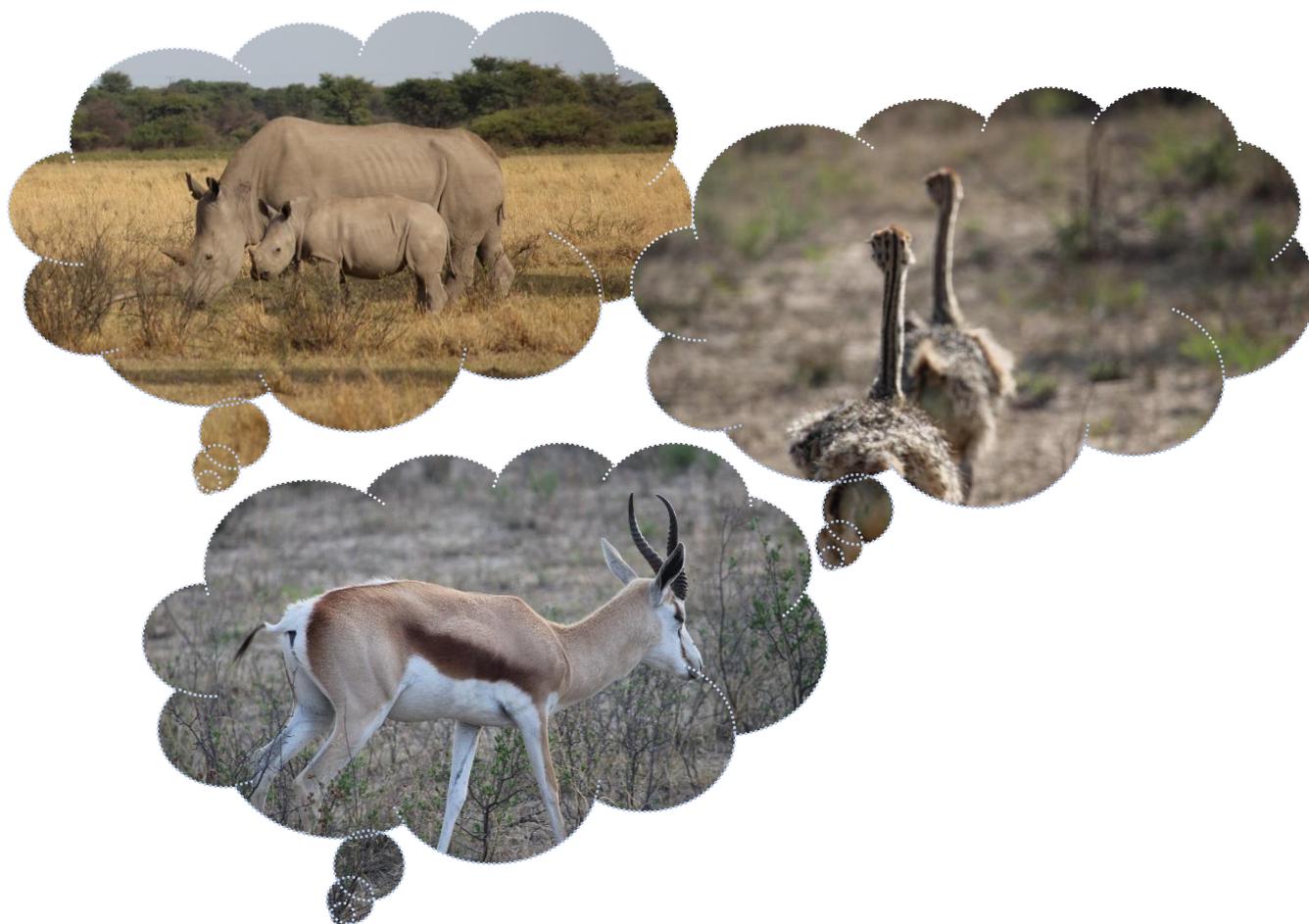
Before we knew it, we'd spotted another nine rhinos... all just meandering along munching on breakfast. Did you know that rhino's go back to the same spot to poo? Almost like a permanent loo - and they call it a midden. I never knew that either. Learnt so much on this trip and I'm still processing everything we saw and did. And this little safari will be one I will never forget. It was simply INCREDIBLE.

Of course, the trip home was NOT without incident... And yet, somehow, Peets managed to escape her third, yes third, fine, but this time for not stopping at security coming through the border. Since we were on the "returning side", the border crossing was super easy and super-fast, but because Peets thought the officer was waving her through, she continued driving when she should have stopped. One lucky woman... and they say it happens in threes!

THERE AND BACK AGAIN: A TASTE OF BOTSWANA

We had temperatures between 39°C to 44°C most days and returning to Joburg this evening I had to put a jersey on because the 25°C at home was cold. 🤖

It's going to take me a while to come down off the high I'm still on after ten days in the wild of Botswana... but I am looking forward to my own PROPER bed tonight.
Here's to Botswana... until we meet again.



END-NOTES:

No matter what... Botswana never disappoints.

You need more time (more than 10 days) - driving time slower due to potholes and the change in speed limits etc.

The Land Cruiser was the unsung hero: comfy and totally capable.

You always need a planned route/itinerary - even if you don't stick to it.

Maybe next time we'll do the trip in a cooler month - the temperature was VERY hot in November.

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