Big Five Horseback Safari – African Explorer

We were excited to see what awaited us: my girlfriend and I started the Big Five Tour today and were looking forward to what we would soon experience.
We had already been to South Africa and spent a few wonderful days at the lodge in Waterberg (http://www.reiterreisen.com/saasta.htm). The programme can be combined perfectly with the Big Five Horseback Safari, and a transfer between the two destinations is offered, taking just 45 minutes.
Highly recommended!

We arrived at our new home for the next four days and got to know our fellow riders: we were only a small group of four riders in total. Apart from us, there was Nina from France and Ann from the Netherlands, both of a similar age to us. We had time to chat with them and sit in the sun before getting to know our guides over a good lunch. During the day, we had perfect riding weather with temperatures of 20-25 degrees! The camp consisted of two-person tents for the guests, a kitchen and dining tent, and an outdoor pool. The tents were comfortably furnished: each had two beds and a small outdoor bathroom with washing facilities, a toilet and an interesting outdoor shower. This was filled with hot water once a day, as desired, so that each of us had the opportunity to take a quick, warm shower. Each tent also had an outdoor terrace. Our guide told us about the approximate daily schedule over coffee and cake. We were looking forward to getting to know our horses and were driven to the lodge. The Triple B Lodge offers an incredibly diverse riding experience in South Africa, just 2.5 hours north of Johannesburg. The comfortable lodge is beautifully situated on a lake and is ideal for a longer stay (http://www.reiterreisen.com/tbtsta.htm).

From the lodge, it took about 20 minutes to drive to the camp where we were staying. Everyone was assigned a horse – my trusty companion Dundee was waiting for me. He was a very even-tempered, forward-going gelding who was easy to handle and absolutely sure-footed. A dream of a horse! We rode back to our camp at a leisurely pace, with a few short gallops, where we took the horses to the paddock and sat by the pool to enjoy wine and popcorn. On the way to the camp, we also passed bodies of water with hippos sticking their noses out of the water or standing at the water's edge.

In the evening, we sat together for a while. It got a bit chilly in the evening, so we were all very happy to take our places in front of the fire and gaze into the embers with a glass of good wine while we waited for our food to be prepared. David was an incredibly good cook and spoiled us every evening with delicious specialities – a starter, vegetables, meat and various side dishes to accompany the main course. The dessert was also incredibly good and none of us went to bed hungry. After dinner, we all sat comfortably by the fire. But as we were getting tired and the next day was to start early, we ran shivering to our tents, where a little surprise awaited us: a wonderful, warm hot water bottle, affectionately called the "sheep" by our Dutch friend. Snuggled up in three blankets with the hot water bottle at our feet, we fell asleep, only to be woken up the next morning with tea, coffee or juice (as desired) served at our bedsides. After a hearty breakfast, we set off on horseback for our first long ride. The terrain was a bit rocky in places, but our horses climbed every rocky path with sure-footedness and determination, while we tried to avoid the hanging branches and thorns. However, the wildlife sightings compensated us for every scratch a short time later: we saw several herds of zebras, many kudus, eland antelopes, impalas and giraffes.

None of the animals were particularly afraid of us and we were able to get close to them. Our guide always had a story to tell and loved to recount legends about birds and other animals. We couldn't get enough of seeing all the animals. No matter how often we passed giraffes, it was always an experience to see them standing majestically behind the trees. After the ride, we took care of our horses and usually had 2-3 hours to relax, during which we read a book or just unwound. With a full stomach after lunch and coffee and cake, we swung ourselves onto the horses for a shorter afternoon ride to observe animals and incorporate a little gallop every now and then.

The next day began with a slightly shorter ride, as we were going to a neighbouring Big Five reserve in the afternoon to go on a game drive. Once we arrived, we immediately got into our jeep and set off. We had the entire jeep to ourselves and our guide told us everything we needed to know about the animals we saw and had an answer to every question. First, we saw a group of rhinos lying together and eating peacefully. They were joined by a few grazing antelopes.

In the distance, we spotted an ostrich, and shortly afterwards, two species of the world's smallest antelope, the dik-diks, galloped past us.

A few baboons could be seen in the branches to the right and left, but unfortunately they disappeared from our camera lens all too quickly. The jeep drove uphill and downhill through the landscape as we tried to spot one animal or another. Our guide usually saw them before we did and pointed them out to us. A lioness was lying in the bushes on the left, lying in wait. She had probably lost sight of her prey after a while, slowly got up and came straight towards our jeep. We felt a little queasy, after all, we didn't want to be prey. She ran leisurely and majestically behind our jeep and then took another path. We drove on, past herds of antelope and zebra and a few giraffes standing still or leisurely nibbling at a tree. Dusk slowly fell and we began to put on warmer clothes.

We spotted a jackal just 2-3 metres away from us and our guide took us straight to a spot where a male lion was lying. He was majestically enjoying himself, stretching out contentedly on the ground. A truly magnificent specimen of his species. After this great find, we made our way back home and reflected on today's wonderful wildlife sightings.

The next day, another surprise awaited us – we had a long ride ahead of us and visited a Baber family who owned a huge property with a large pool and beautiful grounds. After lunch, we had the opportunity to spend a few hours there and ride past a local village on the way. The children waved cheerfully and greeted us enthusiastically. Our last ride was scheduled for later that afternoon. We passed a small lake, which we rode through, and had a few opportunities to gallop before arriving at the lodge and saying goodbye to the horses. We spent some more time there, enjoying the peaceful and pleasant atmosphere at the lodge, before being driven back to camp. David conjured up his last delicious dinner for us and we sat together around the warming fire for a while longer, chatting before our last night in South Africa began.

Our wonderful tour continued into the Tuli Wilderness in Botswana. We were picked up from the camp at around 8 a.m. and drove for about 4 hours to Botswana. The border control went quickly and smoothly and on the other side we were already welcomed by our new guide David. We were greeted with lunch and asked about our preferences for

horses before heading straight to the stables, where everyone was assigned their horse. My companion for the next four days was to be Cimarron, a gelding who seemed very calm at first, but became more and more fun as the days went by and trotted along happily. We set off with a larger group and a spare horse in case any of us wanted to swap horses. A little test put us to the test. We had to gallop, ride a small square and ride back to the group. Each of us passed the test and we were allowed to go on our first ride with our two guides. Right at the start, we saw a huge group of elephants drinking leisurely – an incredible sight.

To our right and left, small herds of zebras, individual giraffes, warthogs and impalas appeared again and again. Long gallops across wide plains awaited us. After about two hours, we reached Two Mashatus Camp. Shortly before we arrived, David took out his whip and cracked it loudly. I jumped at the first crack, startled. It took us a while to realise why he did this: he wanted to announce our arrival so that the staff would be ready for us. When we arrived at the camp, we were immediately greeted with warm towels to freshen up. The camp was also luxuriously furnished with a dining tent, a lounge area and the living tents. These had a small terrace and a separate area with an outdoor shower, a toilet and a small washbasin. We wanted for nothing! In the evening, we enjoyed a delicious three-course meal at the camp and spent time with David and Mpho (our two guides), who had some exciting stories to tell. Mpho was a bit quiet at first, but when he did speak, he usually made us laugh. In the evening, you always had

always had his private escort service to the tent, as you never knew what animals might stray into the area. We all slept quite restlessly on the first night, as there were no fences or barriers to keep the animals out. The sounds of the bush were quite soothing, but we were also aware of the wild animals lurking somewhere outside. However, we trusted the night watchman and our guides and their bush ears, who could definitely ensure our safety in case of danger.

The next day began early at around 6 a.m. We had breakfast and set off on horseback for a longer ride. Once again, we were very lucky and saw several herds of elephants. We were able to ride quite close to them, as they did not seem to be disturbed by our presence. There were many baby elephants among them, looking over at us curiously. My horse was really fresh and lively today, and we decided to try a few small natural jumps along the way, which my horse mastered with confidence. I grew more and more fond of him.

After a short break, we started our journey home and were all hungry by then. After lunch, we had some time to ourselves and were treated to a massage, which felt incredibly good and was very relaxing. In the afternoon, David called us together and we set off on a sundowner tour by jeep.
On the way, we saw some animals and elephants and drank our wine in close proximity to a large herd. David received a call and told us he might have a surprise for us. We were not disappointed! On the way, we saw three cheetah brothers hunting for prey at dusk and watched them for a while. They are incredibly impressive animals and not often

! Tired from all the impressions and amazing animal sightings, we fell asleep peacefully that night after a hearty dinner, without thinking about wild animals.

The next day started early and we went on a long ride in the beautiful wide landscape in the morning and a game drive in the afternoon. It was the last day and our group looked forward to saying goodbye with a touch of sadness. Nevertheless, the evening was quite cheerful – David danced and sang a few funny songs with his crew. With good singing and fun games (Mpho had some good ideas up his sleeve), we had a barbecue and sat around the fire for a long time.
The next morning came faster than expected, and the last ride took us from the camp back to the stables. On the way, we spotted a jackal, zebras and lots of giraffes watching us.

With these wonderful, unforgettable animal sightings in our luggage, we set off again after lunch and a difficult farewell, crossing the border into South Africa and continuing on to Johannesburg. It was hard to say goodbye, and everyone was lost in their own thoughts during the long drive before we said farewell to the group members in the evening and flew back to hot Germany. We will remember the wonderful time we had in South Africa and Botswana for a long time to come!

All information about the programme can be found at
http://www.reiterreisen.com/tba008.htm

July 2015, Angelika Kaiser