

Show me the way to GO HOME

During their 70-day Serengeti adventure, **Villiers Steyn** and **Ji de Wet** visited a number of Africa's large, well-known parks such as Hwange, Serengeti and Selous. Now, on the final leg of their trip, it's the turn of Southern Africa's smaller, lesser-known parks.

Villiers Steyn's decade-long dream of seeing the wildebeest migration in the Serengeti came true early last year. The 70-day trip was planned down to the finest detail, and he and Ji de Wet covered more than 15 000 km and visited 12 large reserves.

Mama Rula's near Chipata in Zambia to Pretoria (14 days, 3255 km)

Day 58 Cooking in Africa

It's 3 pm and it feels as if I'm stepping out of a fridge straight into an oven. We've been driving in the air-conditioned Hilux all day, but now I have to get out to sign a register at the edge of the Mana Pools National Park in northern Zimbabwe. The temperature is up there in the 30s.

The "boom! boom! boom!" emanating from a tiny rondavel next to the gate of poles is so loud the official doesn't even hear us stop. Reaching almost to the ceiling, his speaker wouldn't look out of place at a Rolling Stones concert.

He immediately turns down the volume when he sees me in the doorway. There aren't many visitors at this time of year.

We left the Ruaha National Park more than a week ago, and it's great to be back in a game park. The last few days on the road weren't too bad – we had a great meal at Mama Rula's near Chipata, caught up on the Cricket World Cup with our friends in Lusaka and admired the impressive wall of Lake Kariba – but actually we're looking for animals. The three zebras that sauntered nonchalantly through the streets in the village of Kariba were a nice surprise, but we hope to see big cats at Mana Pools.

Bushveld highway. The small access road to Nyamepi in Mana Pools is long, straight and very corrugated.

Lovemore Chiwara greets us at the reception of the Nyamepi campsite and promises to bring us a large bundle of wood.

"Did you read the park rules?" Ji asks me with big eyes. "This is the first time I see visitors being allowed to get out their cars and walk where they want to." At their own risk, of course.

We pitch our tent under a huge tree and decide it's way too hot for putting on the fly sheet.

We explore the camp, and while walking down the river bank, Ji reckons he now has a better chance of hooking a tiger fish than earlier in our tour. "The water is not as murky."

Day 59-61 Where are the animals?

Expectations play a big part in how you enjoy a destination, and our expectations of Mana Pools were wrong. We heard you see lions around every corner, but it's clearly the wrong time of year for lions. Also, there aren't many game viewing tracks, and those that are there are virtually impassable after the rainy season.

We shift our attention to fishing, but it doesn't go well in this department either. "I can't believe it. The water looks perfect," Ji sighs after reeling in an empty hook for the umpteenth time.

To add insult to injury, our Belgian neighbour, Maarten van de Velde, hooks a giant tiger fish with his second cast – and that after Ji had given him advice.

Yet we're not sorry about our visit to Mana Pools. At night we sit bolt upright in our tent while watching hippos passing metres from us in the bright moonlight. At sunrise, it's the elephants' turn. A giant bull passes by a few times and once even forces us into the vehicle.

The highlight, however, is the shallow water of the Zambezi River, where I sit lazily while Ji readies his bait. Finally he does manage to catch a tiny tiger fish and a barbel.

This is where we stayed

Nyamepi campsite, Mana Pools National Park, Zimbabwe



Where? ± 320 km northwest of Harare
Cost? Entry: US\$20 (R160) pp and \$10 (R80) per vehicle (valid for a week);
Camping: \$20 (R160) pppn away from the riverbank; \$100 (R800) per stand on the riverbank (maximum 6 people); Exclusive stands in other parts of the park cost \$150 (R1 200) per night (maximum 12);
Fishing: \$5 (R40) pppd
Facilities: The large, shady campsite is on a bank of the Zambezi. The ablutions are simple but tidy and have hot water. Firewood can be bought at \$5 (R40) per bundle from reception.
Bookings: Email reservations@zimparcs.co.zw

Chinhoyi Caves National Park, Zimbabwe

Where? 8 km west of Chinhoyi in the north of the country
Cost? \$10 (R80) pppn camping
Facilities: The tidy campsite has a large, green lawn and plenty of trees, as well as a tidy ablution block with hot water. Wood is available at \$5 (R40) per bundle and for \$10 (R80) you can view the caves.
Bookings: It's unlikely that the campsite will be full outside holiday season, but email reservations@zimparcs.co.zw if you want to play it safe.

Maleme Dam campsite, Matobo National Park, Zimbabwe

Where? ±50 km south of Bulawayo
Cost? Entry: \$12 (R96) pp and \$10 (R80) per vehicle (valid for a week);
Camping: \$8 (R64) pppn;
Fishing: \$5 (R40) pppd;
Rhodes's grave: \$10 (R80) pppd;
Facilities: The tiny campsite is surrounded by large boulders and is at the edge of the Maleme Dam where you can fish. However, the ablution buildings are in a bad condition. The tap water smells terrible, and there is no hot water.
Bookings: Send an email to reservations@zimparcs.co.zw

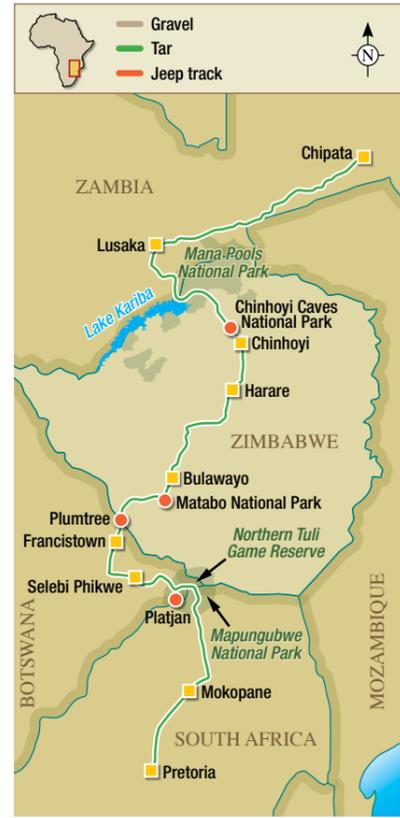
Mashatu main camp, Mashatu Game Reserve, Botswana

Where? ±340 km southeast of Francistown on the eastern tip of Botswana
Cost? US\$415 (R3 320) pppn
Facilities: The Mashatu main camp is a luxury camp with 14 rooms on the banks of the Majale River. It has a bar, conference room and Discovery Room with interesting information and books about the park. Meals and game drives in an open vehicle are included in the price. Visit www.mashatu.com
Bookings: Send an email to reservations@malamala.com

Leokwe camp, Mapungubwe National Park, South Africa



Where? ±70 km northeast of Alldays
Cost? R870 per night for a rondavel with two single beds
Facilities: The camp is hidden in a rocky landscape in the eastern part of the park. The comfortable cottages have well-equipped kitchens and air-conditioning, as well as an outdoor shower and braai. There is also a communal pool.
Bookings: reservations@sanparks.org



What do father and son say?



Tony van de Velde and his son, **Maarten**, have been touring in their 1996 Land Cruiser 4.2 Diesel for three and a half months on an epic trip from De Haan in Belgium to Cape Town.

"Of all the African countries we've visited thus far, Ethiopia was the best. The country is safe, the people friendly and the landscape incredibly beautiful. We particularly enjoyed the mountain views and volcanoes. "Our Land Cruiser is the perfect vehicle for a tour like this. It can go anywhere. We haven't used the sand ladders or hi-lift jack once. However, it is very thirsty and therefore we had an extra fuel tank fitted. We now take 200 litres of diesel with us."



On top of the world. The grave of Cecil John Rhodes in the Matobos National Park is in a place he called World's View.

Day 62 and 63
Uninvited guests

After spending a night at the Chinhoyi Caves National Park, we drive straight through Zimbabwe to the Matobo National Park, just south of Bulawayo.

We unpack in the beautiful campsite at the edge of the Maleme Dam, but the ablution blocks are shocking. The water is so dirty we end up washing with dam water.

The next morning three very tame horses settle in under our gazebo and shove their heads right into the back of the canopy. The more we try to chase them off, the more they act like statues.

The best view in Matobos

Later that afternoon we each buy a permit to visit Cecil John Rhodes's grave. It's located on top of a rock with a view of the surrounding rocky valleys and koppies. Rhodes had discovered it during his nego-

tiations with the Ndebele tribe, and asked to be buried here. He named it World's View. After he had died of heart problems on 26 March 1902, his body was transported from Cape Town to be buried here.

A few enormous free-standing rocks surround the grave, and it looks as if a giant had put them here on purpose. In their shade, scores of tiny, colourful lizards wait for tourists to spoil them with bread-crumbs or drops of water. If you lie down on your stomach and softly scratch on the rock, they scurry right up to your nose.

After a long time we finally head back to camp. Tomorrow will be a long day, because we plan to drive all the way to the eastern point of the Tuli Block in Botswana.

Day 64
A brush with the law

We leave the Matobo National Park early in the morning and head for the Plum-

tree border post. En route we see a row of orange cones in the middle of the road and a traffic officer at the end of it. I slow down and stop right next to the man.

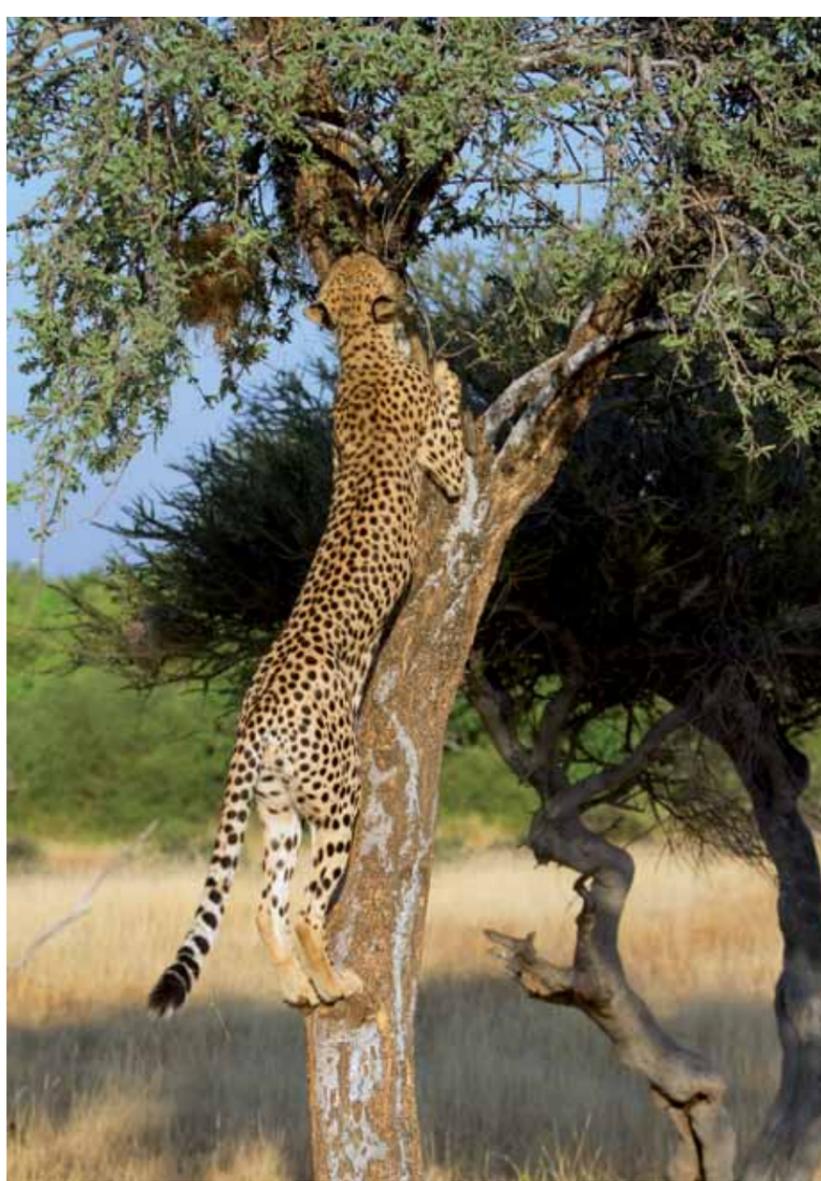
"Good morning. I'm so glad, because today I'm going to arrest you," the official says. Arrest?!

"For what, sir?" I ask.

"Because you didn't stop," he replies.

"But I'm standing still right next to you," I defend myself.

"Exactly. You should have stopped where the cones start and not here next to me," he explained. "It will only cost you \$20."
 Had this happened during the first week of our Serengeti trip, we would probably have paid the ridiculous amount for the ridiculous transgression. But not now. The corruption in Zambia and Tanzania made us wise up and we have no time for it now.



Acting like a leopard. A playful cheetah female charges up the stem of a shepherd's tree near the Mashatu main camp of the Northern Tuli Game Reserve.

"Sorry, sir, but we don't have any cash with us," I lie.

"But it's only \$20," the man says, trying to convince us it's not that bad.

"My money is finished. I don't have any more on me. Sorry."

The conversation carries on for another five minutes, until the official realises he won't win. Proud of our victory, we drive on.

Between Plumtree and Francistown we're stopped a second time, this time by two traffic officers in an unmarked vehicle with a built-in speed measurement device.

The officers tell me that I drove 90 km/h in a roadworks zone where the speed limit was 60 km/h.

I insist on paying the fine of 400 pula (about R440) – which was fortunately reduced by 300 pula – at the police station in Francistown. This is my third speeding fine on the tour, while JI had none. I'll never hear the end of it.

Day 65-67
My home from home

We spend the next three nights at the Mashatu main camp in the Northern Tuli Game Reserve.

I lived here for three years while studying leopards for my master's in nature conservation.

However, the staff, with whom I'm good friends, barely recognise me with my big red beard.

"Villiers, is that you?" "What's going on with your face?" "You must get rid of that thing right now!"

On our first morning at Mashatu we decide it's time for some exercise. We join Elvis, our guide, and two other guests on a hike along the Majale River to the top of White Cliffs.

I remember these cliffs very well. After all, it was here that one of the leopards I studied, the White Cliffs female, raised her cubs.

What I'll remember most fondly is Africa's friendly people. Their willingness to help when the pawpaw hits the fan was moving and constantly lifted our spirits.

Villiers and JI's top 10 tour tips

After 70 days and 15 354 km together on the road, the two Africa travellers share their top 10 tour tips.

Consult Bradt. Plan as thoroughly as possible and as long as possible in advance. Bradt travel guides are very comprehensive.

Be realistic. The more accurate your expectations of a road, a city or a reserve, the better the chance that you'll enjoy it.

Just show up. Make as few bookings as possible, because it'll only rush you. (When visiting during the high season or a very exclusive or popular campsite, however, you'll have to book.)

Go like Little Red Riding Hood – don't rush. If you drive a little slower, are patient at border posts and spend a few extra days at a nice campsite, you'll enjoy the tour much more.

Beware of the dark. Never drive at night – too many animals walk in and alongside the road after sundown.

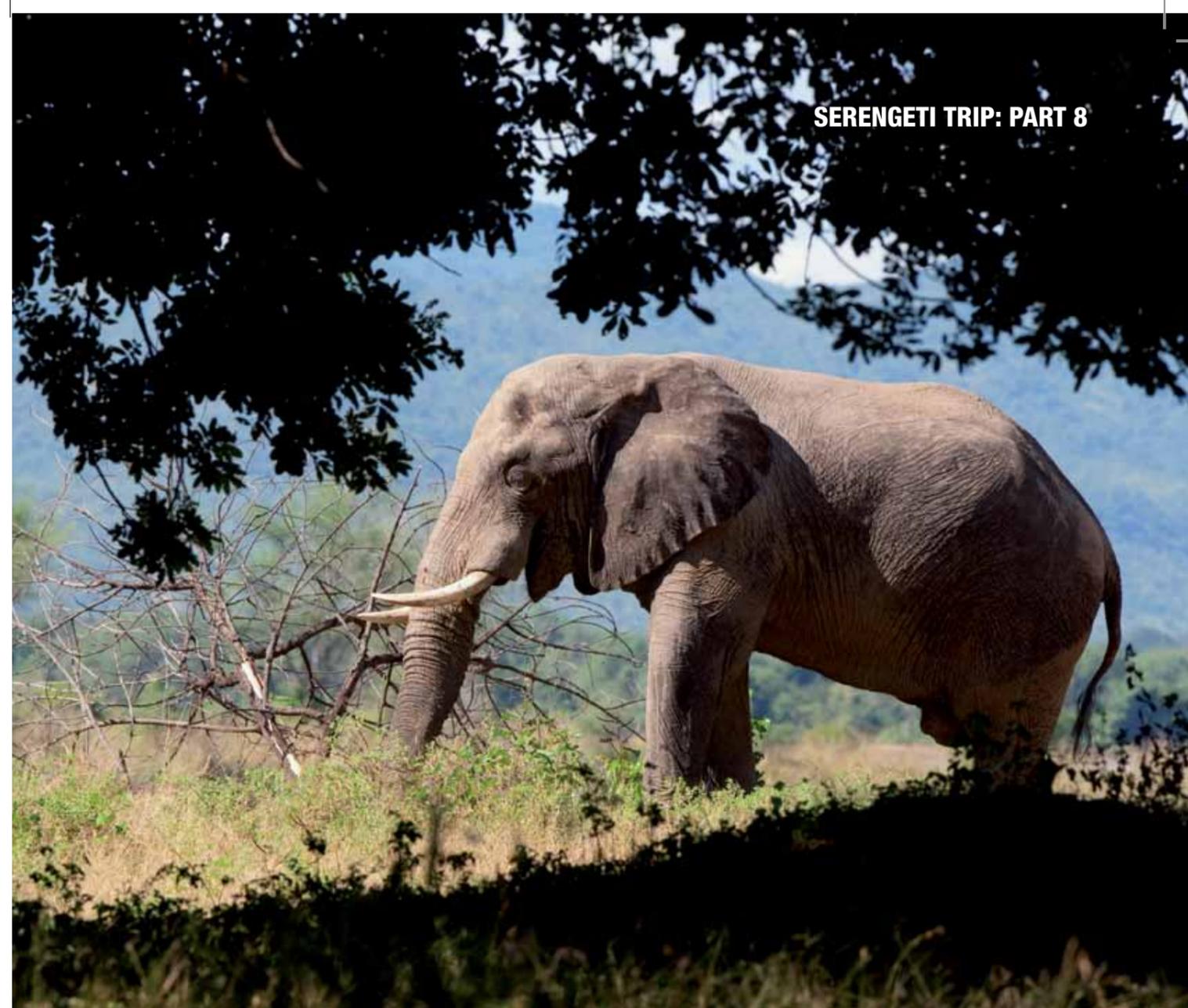
Don't panic! Not unnecessarily anyway, when things don't go according to plan. Rather think and adapt to the situation.

Who's coming? Pick the right travel companion. The better the company, the better the tour.

Local is lekker. Never underestimate the value of local knowledge. If you want to find out something, ask a local.

Do it with a smile. The friendlier you are, the friendlier the people you encounter.

Point and shoot. Take as many pictures as possible and keep a diary.



Who's boss of the campsite? A giant elephant bull grazes on the bank of the Zambezi River at the Nyamepi campsite in the Mana Pools National Park.

The good, the bad and the ugly of Africa's roads



The condition of a road influences your choice of vehicle, your travel time, tyre pressure and what you store your eggs in.

Of all the countries, Zambia's tar roads were the worst. Although the T1 between Livingstone and Lusaka looks beautiful, its brother the T2 (or the so-called Great North Road) is in a bad condition. It looks as if a Lancaster has dropped a bomb every 100 m between Serenje and Tunduma.

The tar roads of Botswana, Zimbabwe, Malawi and Tanzania aren't nearly as bad. The worst corrugated road we drove is between the Naabi Hill entrance gate of the Serengeti and Seronera camp. It steals number plates, hubcaps and all other loose items on your vehicle.

But the most scenic gravel roads we drove

were also around Seronera. Here, twisty jeep tracks take you past rocky koppies, all along streams to open plains where animals graze from horizon to horizon.

Drive Out's tips for the roads:

Get information about the roads ahead from local residents at the place you're spending the night. It's usually the most accurate and will help you plan your route.

Be extra careful of buses and trucks, especially in Tanzania, because they drive wherever they want, whenever they want, and usually at crazy speeds. Reduce your tyre pressure to ±1.8 bar when driving on gravel roads. It'll stop your fillings from rattling out.

SERENGETI TRIP: PART 8

It's great to be able to stretch our legs for a change, and the view over the riverbed makes every step worthwhile.

Five out of five

Something remarkable happens on our second day. We see the grand slam of predators: lion, leopard, cheetah, spotted hyena and wild dog – and all of them in one day.

During the morning game drive we encounter five hyenas and later a lion. We spot three of the rarest predators during our afternoon drive: first a calm cheetah female, then a shy leopard male and, finally, a couple of wild dogs right outside the main camp. Although we don't take the best pictures, this is an achievement we won't repeat soon.

Day 68

Back to South Africa

Our date with Mashatu's big cats is not over yet. First we follow two lionesses and their five cubs for more than half an hour while they walk from Disappointment

Koppie to Baboon's Bedroom. After that, we drive on to Cheetah's Koppie where we follow a silly female cheetah across a grassy plain, before she runs up the trunk of a tree without warning. Who said cheetahs can't climb trees?! She skips from one tree to the next.

We hear more good news on the VHF radio: Somebody has seen a female leopard in a nyala-berry tree near Nel's windmill. The very opposite of skittish, she doesn't even lift her head when we stop below her. All we see are four legs and a tail. What a morning!

After a fantastic final morning at Mashatu, it's time to tackle our last stretch of road in a foreign country – the road between the main camp and the Platjan border post. We left here more than 68 days ago and can't wait to put our feet back on South African soil. While crossing the Limpopo, we sing "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" loudly and give each other a high-five.

But before we return to Pretoria, we head for our final park: the Mapungubwe National Park in Limpopo. You

can't drive through this area without visiting the park. We spend our final two afternoons on the park's lookout platforms and use the time and the peace and quiet to process everything we've experienced in the past ten weeks.

We try to pick our favourite camps, parks, animals, pictures and activities and relive a bunch of highlights.

There are so many things I'll never forget: the crystal clear hot water at Kapishya Hot Springs, the hot-air balloon ride over the Serengeti, the 16 teeny lion cubs in the road outside Seronera in Serengeti and the gentle Maasai tribe. Also the soccer match against the schoolboys of the Mloka Village and the white water rafting on the Zambezi River. It's hard to believe we've seen and done so many things.

But what I'll remember most fondly is Africa's friendly people. Their willingness to help when the pawpaw hits the fan was moving and constantly lifted our spirits.

The big question is, of course, where to next? But for now it's *kwaheri* – goodbye! 📷

Gear: Comfort is the key

Just because you're sleeping in a tent doesn't mean you have to sit on the cool box, eat on your lap or use your K-Way jacket as a pillow. With this gear you can camp for 70 days without going mad:

Well-rested

The most important piece of comfort gear is the bed you'll sleep on. I find an inflatable mattress too much trouble to inflate. It deflates when it's cold and takes up lots of space. It can also get punctured.

We use two Natural Instincts foam mattresses. They're big enough for a tall guy like me (1.81 m) and thick enough that you won't feel the pebbles under the tent floor.

Cost: R500 for a 197 cm x 70 cm x 6 cm mattress from Outdoor Warehouse.

Sit pretty

Aside from your mattress, you spend the most time in your camp chair. Don't buy middle-market. You can sleep in our Natural Instincts folding chairs, they're that comfortable, and they come with a holder in each arm for a beer or an iPhone.

Cost: R270–R500 from Outdoor Warehouse

One, two, three, shade!

I haven't seen an awning that's quicker and easier to put up than the Eezy-Awn 2000 series. We could pitch it or break it down within two minutes. It automatically rolls up when you take it down.



Ours is 2.5 m wide, pulls out by 2.1 m and offers enough shade for comfortable braaiing and eating under when it rains.

Cost: R4 161 from Safari Centre (installation excluded)

Hang around

We hung our hammocks on anything sturdy – even the Hilux, a thorn tree or the cross beams of a shelter did the trick.

Cost: It doesn't cost an arm and a leg – a cotton

hammock will only set you back R200 at Outdoor Warehouse.

Two are better than one

If you only take one table, the boerie and pap will eventually end up next to the laptop and bird book. We took a second table along: a big, sturdy plastic table for cooking and eating and a smaller aluminium table for other things.

Cost: R600 for the big plastic table from Outdoor Warehouse; R500 for the small one from Makro. 📷