

## Dec 19<sup>th</sup> 2017 Johannesburg

We are in Johannesburg! It's indeed finally time to escape the dark rainy winter weather at home. Now we have to wait for about three weeks for our Unimog to arrive in South Africa. The shipping company has delayed departure already several times but we couldn't change our flights anymore. Therefore, we are very happy to find asylum for such a long time with our dear friends in Joburg.

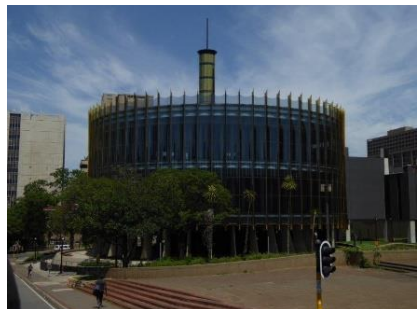
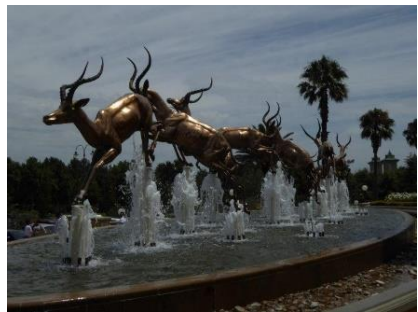


Johannesburg, 'Joburg' or 'Jozi' is located at 1700m altitude, therefore the climate is very agreeable. During the day it can get very hot, but at night usually it cools down nicely. In 1886 gold was found and this was the beginning of the city of Johannesburg.

Many high walls, barbed wire and electric fences are proof of Joburg's dangerous reputation, but a lot has improved – especially since the soccer world championship in 2010. Though most of the professional city and work life has moved to the outskirts and in the suburbs life is pretty normal.

During a city tour with the Hop-on-hop-off bus we visit the sightseeing hotspots like Constitution Hill, Gandhi Square, Carlton Center, Nelson-Mandela-Bridge and much

more. We not only get a thorough overview of the city, we also learn some interesting facts. I.e. is every tree in Joburg planted by hand, which makes it the biggest man-made forest in the world. Very important to know is as well, that for South Africans chicken is considered salad...

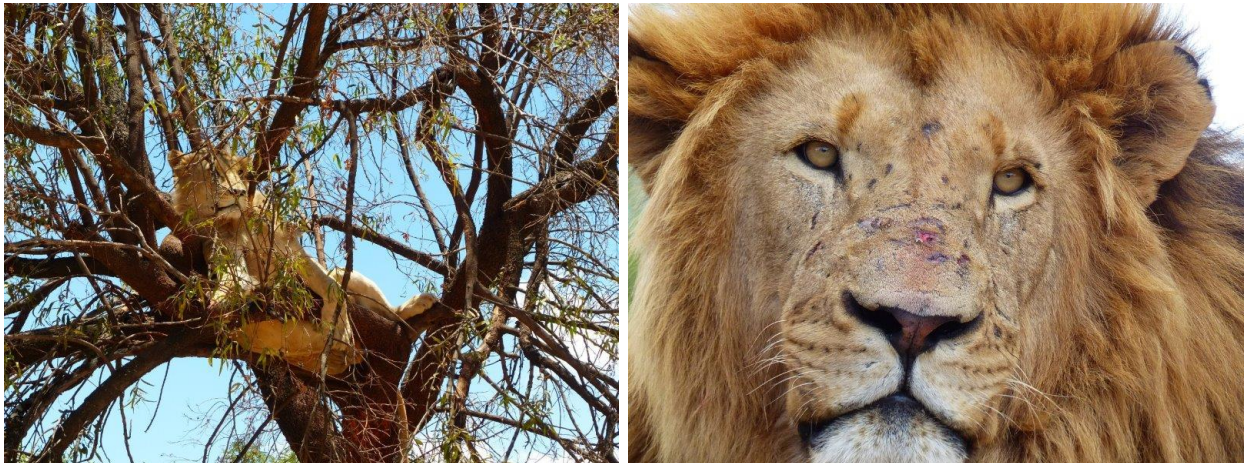


In the Apartheid Museum a temporary exhibition about the life of Nelson Mandela is ongoing, we learn a lot about the time of apartheid, which has happened in fact not too long ago. The amount of information is abundant, there is a lot to read... after a few hours in the dark museum reading about a dark topic of history, it is nice to step out into the warm sun of the present.



### **Dec 31<sup>st</sup> 2017, Lion Park, Johannesburg**

To get a first taste of safari, we visit the Lion and Safari Park near Johannesburg where it is possible to do a 'Self-Drive' with your own car. Because it's holiday season and weekend many other people had the same idea and it is pretty crowded. However, we still get a good glimpse of some of the animals and of course of the lions who live in a separate area from the other animals.



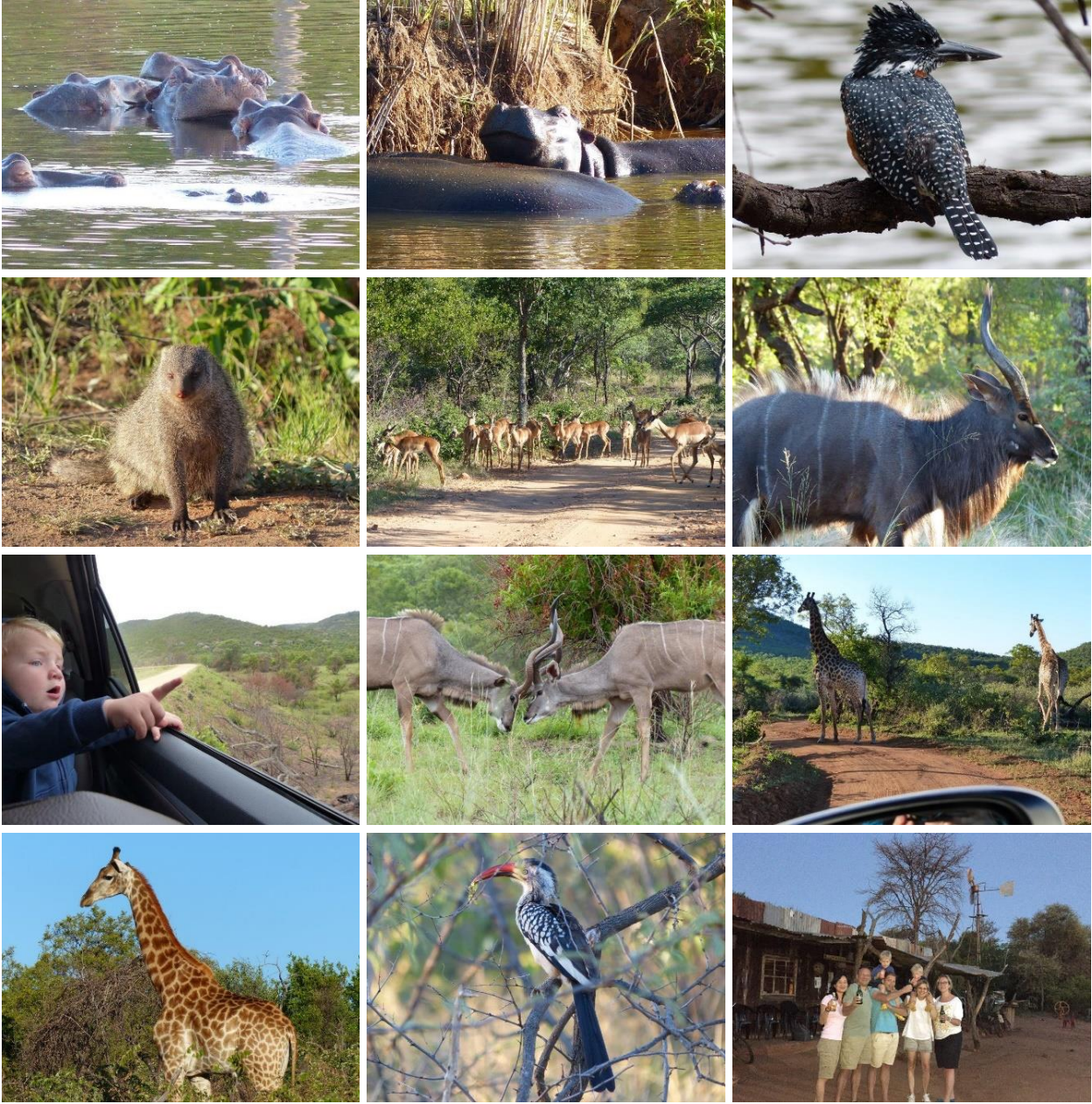


## 2. bis 5.1.2018 Mabalingwe

We are going on our first real safari! The Mabalingwe Nature Reserve is located about 180km north of Johannesburg and can be reached by car conveniently on the highway. We were lucky to get a holiday house last minute, because of the summer school

holidays everything is fully booked. One big grocery shopping trip and we are on our way.

Early mornings and late afternoons we do game drives with our car through the nature reserve, relax and have BBQs in the evening. The holiday house is spacy with a small pool and has a fantastic view – nothing to complain about.



## 9.1.2018 Parys

Slowly we have to start our journey south, a little rental car will bring us to Port Elizabeth. The first day we drive to Parys, 130km south of Johannesburg, which has many antique shops and galleries, but everything is closed when we arrive. A very picturesque river with an old suspension bridge runs through the city, but otherwise we had imagined a “cuter” place. Most of the shops and restaurants are along the main road which is heavily frequented by heavy trucks blasting through town.



Our AirBnB hosts are proud owners of two Merle Great Danes, they are huge and still not fully grown up. It is so much fun to watch these two dogs, but this B&B is definitely not the right choice for people who are afraid of dogs.



We learn that South Africans are very considerate and polite drivers. If a faster car is approaching, the car in the front moves to side and lets the upcoming car pass. After the faster car has passed they thank you by briefly engaging the emergency indicators. With the many trucks on the road we are quite busy to switch on and off our emergency indicators. But as we drive a small car we get in fact more Thank You's than the other way around...

## 10.1.2018 Bloemfontein, Trompsburg

Bloemfontein itself is a rather large city and because of its central location an important traffic hub. For the Boeres it was historically an important city as it was their capital and was fought for heavily during the Boere War. Actually, we pass through Bloemfontein without stopping.

The landscape is getting drier, behind Bloemfontein the Karoo starts. The Karoo is a semi-arid half desert, which covers about 40% of the South African land area. The landscape is somehow monotonous but interesting at the same time. Huge empty areas and paddocks stretch out as far as the eye can see. A huge dust cloud most always means that a tractor is working on a paddock.



Despite the very little rain fall there are many farms located in the Karoo, mainly with extensive land usage raising Mohair goats. Windmill driven water pumps are all over the place. Currently there is a heat wave (40C) and a draught, but water seems to be still used very generously. Even the lawn is still watered and paddocks are irrigated during the heat of the day, where a big part of the water will evaporate before reaching the ground.



Hit the brakes! A tortoise is crossing the road. Luckily a warning sign earlier has kept us alert otherwise we may have mistaken her for a rock. We put the Leopard aka Mountain Tortoise back on the side of the road and hope it was the correct side she wanted to go to....



For the night we stay on a farm near Trompsburg. The village is small, there is only one grocery store with basic items, but it has three liquor stores. Alcohol is not allowed to be sold in supermarkets but only in licensed liquor shops.

### 11.1.2018 Graff-Reinet

On our way further South we stop at the Gariep Dam located about 200 km south of Bloemfontein, which is damming the river Orange. The dam was finished 1971 and is the largest water reservoir in South Africa with a surface area of 370 square kilometers (when full). The water is mainly used for irrigation and the dam is generating electricity. But with the current severe draught most dams are not full or even totally drained.



From here on, the landscape is getting more interesting, hillier and with quite a few flat topped hills, so called „Karoo Koppies“. They are characteristic for the South Karoo landscape. In the afternoon we reach Graff-Reinet, the "Gem of the Karoo" (in their own words). Graff-Reinet was founded 1786 and is the fourth oldest settlement of South Africa (after Cape town, Stellenbosch and Swellendam). There are many well preserved buildings constructed in the **dutch cape colonial style**.

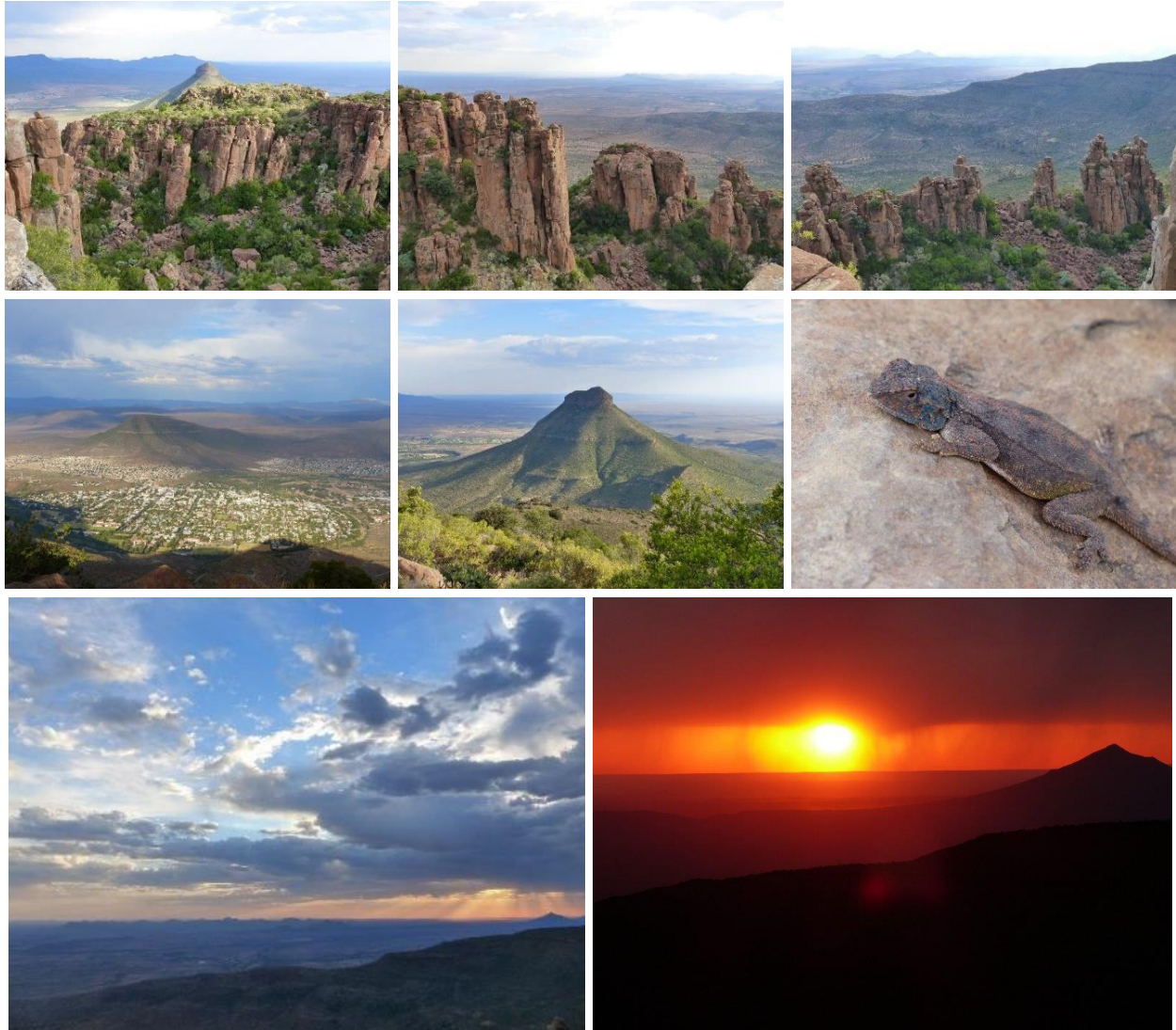


What is special about Graff-Reinet is, that this town is completely surrounded by the Camdeboo National Park. We use our „SAN Wild Card“ for the first time. This is an



annual admission card for all National Parks in South Africa and after purchase all National Parks of South Africa are for free.

The main attraction of the Camdeboo National Park is the Valley of Desolation, where 120m high steep cliffs are exposed. From the Toposcope viewpoint one has a great view of the Spandau „Cathedral“ Mountain and the city of Graff-Reinet. We stay until sunset, which is a good half an hour later than in Johannesburg. A large tour group is unfortunately disturbing our peaceful evening, but from their tour guide we learn that today's visibility is up to 150 km.



For dinner we try local Karoo cuisine: „Bobotie“ is an oven-baked dish made from minced meat. The dish is actually originating from the Indonesian-Malay cuisine and was introduced to Africa by the so-called Cape Malay people. These Cape Malay were mainly Indonesian slaves which were brought to Africa by the Dutch East India Company. Who would have thought that we would learn something about the history of

Indonesian, Malay and Indian slaves in Africa through a dish. Unfortunately no-one warned us that Bobotie is a very spicy dish.



### 12.1.2018 Nieu Bethesda

The little village Nieu Bethesda was founded 1875 and is located about 50km from Graaff-Reinet. The drive there is through a dry valley and after a few sharp turns we reach the birth place and home of the local artist Helen Martins.



Although suffering of the heat wave of 40C, we still get ourselves going to do this trip. Helen Martins used mainly cement and glass as material for her pieces of art and recycled all different kind of glass. As an artist and a rather special character life for her was tough in such a conservative environment at her times. Therefore she displayed her pieces of art mainly in her own yard. Owls, camels and religious themes were her dominating topics and her house got famous as the "Owl House and Camel Yard". Her live ended unfortunately tragically when she committed suicide at the age of 79.





After so much culture, we need to recharge our batteries in „The Brewery and Two Goats“. Here, all the food is homemade, the cheese, salami, bread, chutneys – they even brew their own beer and roast their own coffee! It’s all delicious, except for the mosquitoes which are eating us alive, in the middle of the day!

