

13. - 19.1.2018 Port Elizabeth

We reach Port Elizabeth or better „P.E.“, also known as the Windy City. PE is a nice town partly built on steep slopes that remind us of San Francisco. PE also has a big city beach and cities with a beach always have their special own flair...



From the Donkin Reserve with its lighthouse (built 1860), the pyramid (built by Sir Donkin in memory of his wife Elizabeth) and the Donkin semi-attached houses we have a good view of the harbor of Port Elizabeth. We come here frequently to look out for the “Carmen”, the Roll-on-Roll-off ferry which is bringing our Unimog down here.



We still have time to kill and explore the city, for example the Town Hall on Market Square and Fort Frederik; we drive along the coast line and to Sardinia Bay – a nice swimming beach with huge sand dunes.





As we visit the famous Feather Market Centre, we see a large crowd of people in their best Sunday gowns. We are curious and learn that this is a funeral. Judging from this big amount of dressed up people a very very important person must have died.

The Feather Market Centre was in the former days a market place for Ostrich feathers. In the boom years of the 19th century Ostrich farmers got very wealthy. Today the ostrich feathers only play a minor role and are less displayed on hats and clothes but rather used as dusters. However, in the meantime Ostrich meat got very popular and ostrich farming is gaining popularity again.



The “Carmen” is scheduled to arrive at port on January 16th at 1:00 p.m. and should be visible from the view point of the Donkin Reserve. As we are staying nearby, we drive to the view point several times the day, the last time even at night a 11:30 p.m. but no “Carmen” in sight. Let’s hope that no major problem has occurred. But as we do not get any message from the clearing agent we take it as “no news is good news”.

The next day on January 17th at 9:00 a.m. we meet our clearing agent and have to pay the clearing fees. From him we learn that the Carmen could only enter port and dock at 3:00 a.m. because of the stormy weather. Afterwards we drive to the port together, where we see in total three expedition vehicles and two special fire trucks parked up on the pier.

This morning nothing more will happen, we are told to re-assemble at 12:40p.m. At the agent’s office we meet Angela and Carlo who are travelling with a Fuso expedition truck and together we take up today’s tasks: clearing customs, returning rental cars, getting a camp site and returning to the port by taxi to pick-up the trucks. At 2:30 p.m. the trucks are released and we can finally get hold of our cars!



At first sight, all looks ok, but as we want to drive out of the port we hear a very loud hissing sound and realize that compressed air is escaping somewhere. After some search, we discover, that the compressed air hose below the driver's seat is broken. We lose so much air that we can't drive anymore because the breaks will not release without air. The temporary solution is to cut the hose and seal it so we can build up pressure and drive. Well, our first destination in PE is the Mercedes Benz truck workshop in North End.

At the Mercedes workshop everyone is excited to see an Unimog from Germany, one mechanic after the other is visiting our truck for a chat. The broken hose is fixed quickly with a new fastener, we also get a quick car wash to get rid of the thick salt cover – and all this for free! Now we are excited about this service.



Now we are getting ready to roll. But the day starts with a power outage in Summerstrand, our part of town, so we can't draw any cash at the ATM, supermarkets are closed, as the electronic cashier system doesn't work and no fuel can't be pumped at the filling station. Luckily, one only has to drive further until the traffic lights are working again and the world is back to normal.

We got a lot to do today and need to go to different shops, most important are new local gas bottles, as we left our German ones at home. In South Africa, only gas cylinders over 9 kg can be exchanged for full ones, all smaller size cylinders below 9 kg need to be purchased first and then have to be filled at a gas filling station. Therefore, with our brand new two 7 kg gas cylinders we drive to a gas filling station. The adapter for South African gas bottles, which we bought in Germany, luckily fits our regulator. Good, that our long and tedious research about gas bottles and their fittings has paid off. After a full day driving through PE we get almost everything done and also have a good overview of town.

At the Pine Lodge Caravan Park we meet Monika and Jürgen Döll with their kids Lenja and Silas (www.doellinafrica.com). They want to travel for one year through Southern Africa and are already for six months on the road. They share some valuable tips for our onwards journey. We did not expect that right at the beginning we meet so many nice and interesting people.



19.1.2018 Addo Elephant Park

Finally, we start our journey and are on our way to the Addo Elephant Park. The park is located 70 km east of Port Elizabeth, a suitable first destination.

After registration at the reception with our SAN Wild Card we enter the park in the early afternoon. Unfortunately, all camp sites are fully booked so we can only enter as day visitors which means we have to leave the park by 6:30p.m.

During our first game drive we see many warthogs, zebras, kudus, haartebeest and just before sun set two single elephants and a small herd of elephants at a water hole.



As we have to camp outside the park, we follow a recommendation on iOverlander. This app lists a wild camp spot near the tree nursery of the Addo Parks next to some railway tracks. We camp hidden behind bushes far enough from the main road; the tree nursery is already closed for the day and all is very quiet.

20.1.2018 Addo Elephant Park

The early bird catches the worm – if you want to see animals, you have to get up early. For today's morning game drive we do get up early and are at the entrance gate of the Addo Park at 5:30a.m. However, unfortunately we are informed, that Day Visitors are only allowed to enter the park at 7.00 am, 5:30am is only for guests who stay inside the park. Damn, we could have enjoyed a bit more beauty sleep. Well, we park at the entrance gate and have breakfast.

Again, we cruise along the park and see plenty of zebras, kudus, hartebeest, but only one single elephant. We watch a giant snail crossing the road and wonder if it is not too

dry for snails here? To complete our Insect and Small Game Safari, we see many centipedes, two tortoises and plenty of dung beetles.



At 10:00 a.m. we reach the Hapoor Dam waterhole and catch two elephants leaving the scene. A pity, we just missed them, but we decide to wait for a while and see if anything else comes for a drink.

Suddenly, a herd of elephants appears on the horizon and in the end is almost running towards the water, they must be very thirsty. While the first herd is still frolicking in the water, a second herd is approaching. And it won't stop, one herd after the other is approaching from all directions. What a spectacle and we are sitting in the front row.

It's hard to decide where to look first and which elephants to watch as there is so much happening at the same time. They are playing in the water, splashing mud, drinking, swimming, fighting, resting... We watch and watch and wait until the very last elephant has left the scene. Never before did four hours pass by so quickly. What a great experience, best elephant party we ever attended!





During our evening game drive we are lucky again... For the first time we discover an Aardwolf.



21.1.2018 Addo Elephant Park, Van Stadens Rivermouth

Yesterday's, game viewing is hard to beat, but as we are staying near the park and entry is for free with our Wild card, we decide to visit the park one more time. Also, we would like to discover the lions which are supposed to live in the park as well.

In regards to elephants we are lucky, we find them again at the Hapoor Dam Waterhole and also at the Rooddam Waterhole. But this time we don't stay that long.



Under scorching heat of 36C and very hot blowing wind we drive towards the coast, where it is at least a little cooler. By chance we arrive at the Van Stadens Rivermouth as we took one turn too early. Here we find a caravan park next to a shallow river with impressive sand dunes in the background which invites us for a swim.

We manage to have a quick dip in the river before the sun disappears, a strong wind comes up and it starts to rain. Soon a huge thunderstorm is catching up with us, lasting for over an hour and forcing us to retreat into the truck where we watch the lightning like TV.



22.1.2018 Patensy, Kouga Dam

The Baavianskloof valley is a nature reserve with great landscape, worth a visit. The valley runs parallel north of the famous Garden Route which runs directly at the coast. The road takes us through the Gamtoos Valley and through the cities of Hankey and Patensie. In Hankey there is the grave of Sarah Baartman, one of the first black persons who was brought to Europe at the beginning of the 19th century as an “attraction” to be displayed publicly. She became a ‘celebrity’ and was referred to in Europe as the „Hottentot Venus“. She died 1815 in France young and impoverished at only 26 years of age.

Only in August 2002 her remains were exhumed in France and returned to Hankey. Unfortunately, the road leading to her grave is currently under construction and the grave can presently not be visited.



The Gamtoos Valley is the valley of the citrus fruit industry. The citrus fruit plantations are stretching out all the way to the horizon, mainly oranges, and one citrus farm follows the other.



In Patensie we stop for lunch in the “Tolbos Country Shop & Tea Garden“, where we take up most of the parking lot and the welcome is accordingly. The friendly people at the café inform us that access to the Baavianskloof is currently not possible. Yesterday’s heavy thunder storm and downpours have damaged the road. Cleaning the road from the mud and debris may take up some time.



Therefore, we change our plan, take it slowly and drive a detour to the Kouga Dam. Here we discover a huge pick nick area and decide to stay for the night. The Kouga Dam is also alarmingly empty with a water fill percentage of only 7.17%.



23.1.2018 Oyster Bay

The dark clouds have passed and under blue skies we give it a second try to drive the Baviaanskloof road. The entry into the valley is in Komdomo, where you have to register at the reception and pay the entry fee. Unfortunately, here we are told that the road is still unpassable. We try to negotiate, arguing that the Unimog would not have any problem to drive through a bit of mud and debris, but after the staff has called her manager we are still not allowed in.

The lady at the reception tries to convince us several times to make use of their camp site while waiting for the road to re-open. It gives us a bit of an after taste – how bad can the road really be or is she trying to sell her camp site? Well, we do not want to wait an indefinite number of days on their camp site, turn around and head for the coast again.





Just in time for lunch we reach Port St Francis and try the local fish. The disposable boxes even for dine-in customers are not really environmentally friendly and we hope that these are only used to save precious water by not washing up dishes.

We drive further to Oyster Bay where the car park is located next to the sand dunes on the beach. Most of the holiday cottages are empty as the holiday season has ended, so we decide to stay in the front row for the night. At the Braai-area we BBQ our beef and enjoy eating under the stars as we can finally sit outside. The fishing vessels not far from the coast fish at night for squid with very bright lights and light up the horizon.

