

## 29.11.2019 Bilene

Early morning many workers are busy at the campsite moving timber, digging trenches and cleaning the place, most importantly it makes lots of noise. All this is happening in front of our door so they can get a good view of what we are doing. Soon, this gets a bit out of hand, we feel like being on a construction site and decide to leave. One more time driving the rough track, then we are on the EN1 driving southbound, passing by villages, police checks, radar speed control checks while having plenty of opportunity to shop beside the road: Bananas, Mangos, Papayas and Cashew nuts...



In Macai we take the turn off to Bilene and have to search for the „Laguna Camp“. A few more signs would help a lot to get more customers! Also here the road is not good with many low hanging power lines across the road. If a house is connected to power, they simply run a cable from the main power line to the house across the road but of course not with a minimum height of at least 4 m. Reaching the camp takes again much longer than anticipated....

As the name suggests, the Laguna Camp is located at the lagoon of Bilene. High sand dunes are blocking the view to the sea. Just four days ago the Bilene lagoon opened up its mouth to the sea, after it was closed off for three years and therefore without direct access to the sea. A very rare event all the locals talk about!



Also here everyone is busy preparing for the coming peak season. Last minute cleaning, painting and gardening are ongoing. From mid-December onwards hordes of mainly South Africans will arrive for Christmas holidays; all resorts, campsites, restaurants and bars will be full, prices during this time of the year will more than double.

Unfortunately, lots of mosquitos are attacking us and we have to retreat into the cabin for dinner. It's almost impossible to sit outside after sunset.

### **30.11.2019 Macaneta**

The mosquitos are annoying not only in the evening. Even in morning hundreds sit in the shower waiting for you to undress... so again we move on.

After driving one round through Bilene we head back to the main road on the bumpy track with the low power lines, after 30km we are on the EN1. The next town Manhica has a Shoprite supermarket and as our supplies are running low this is our next stop.





We reach Marracuene, where we have to take the new bridge crossing the Rio Incomati river to Praia Macanete. The bridge toll is 350Mzn (~5€) for each crossing and the ferry is no longer operating. The last few kilometers turn again into a 4x4 track, but finally we reach the „Roelieze Lodge“.

In Roelieze we were expecting a little laid-back lodge with few guests, as we usually were the only guests on a campsite. But the very opposite is the case, here the party is on! Today is Saturday and we are only about 50 km away from Maputo, which means a lot of day visitors and weekend guests are visiting. The pool is full of people and screaming kids, we feel like camping in a public outdoor pool. Many dressed up, chic couples are here, a party is happening, we are definitely back to civilization.



### 1.12.2019 Macanete

In the morning we do some work on the Unimog. Beside many smaller things to fix the electrical distribution box for our rear-view camera has been ripped out by one of the many branches dragging over our roof and is now dangling from the roof. We glue the box back on and also install a branch guide from a piece of stainless steel we still had with us.

Our camping friend Patrick traveled to Swaziland a few days ago and reports about the many Rhino sightings in the Hlana Nationalpark. His border crossing was easy and quick. He is now putting a bee in our bonnet, because the most direct way to Johannesburg is through Swaziland. In the afternoon we plan our travels and do some research; maybe we indeed go through Swaziland to South Africa. This would save us some mileage and gives us the opportunity to get to know a new country.

Today's fishing is successful and Werner catches his first "Large Spot Pompano"



## 2.12.2019 Maputo

We have to see a computer repair shop in the capital Maputo, which is in 50 km away. Our laptop does not want to start anymore. Otherwise we would have most likely avoided the big and chaotic city of Maputo.

Soon we are stuck in capital city traffic and move only slowly from one traffic light to the next. All the traffic from North to South as well as East to West has to pass through this main road through Maputo. But as always, there is a lot to see and discover from our elevated seating position in the Unimog.





The computer repair shop is located centrally at the Avenida de 24 Julho and to our surprise we even find a parking spot. Maputo is not as narrow as we feared. In the shop Murphy's law happens, we start the laptop and it works! Before it has not started for weeks. We could have saved the detour to Maputo, but we got a good impression of the city and most importantly our laptop works again.

We leave the city and drive to Namaacha, the last settlement before the border to Swaziland. Yes, we have decided to travel via Swaziland to Johannesburg. We find the wild campsite listed on iOverlander camp quite hidden from the road and enjoy the cooler breeze, as we have climbed to 400m of elevation.



### **03.12.2019 Simunye, Hlane Nationalpark**

In Namaacha we spend all our very last Meticais on Diesel and drive to the border post. The border crossing from Namaacha in Mozambique to Lomashasha in Eswatini aka Swaziland is indeed a rather quick one. By the way, Swaziland is now officially renamed to Eswatini. In April 2018 the king renamed the country to free it of its colonial past. So far, the old name is still more familiar and still used.

In Mozambique our papers are stamped out quickly, the border is not busy except for us only one other woman wants to cross border by foot. In Swaziland we have to pay road tax and they check our truck only briefly – that's all. We can hardly believe that we are done already and ask the officials again if we haven't forgotten anything. The visa is valid for 30 days and is for free, a car insurance is not required.

Swaziland is slightly smaller than the size of New Jersey, the highest mountain peaks are 1800 m above sea level. Since 1940 more than 1.250 square kilometers of forest has been created as Swaziland did not have any native natural forest. New country, same procedure. We stop in the first larger town behind the border Simunye to draw some cash, do some shopping and buy a new local SIM card. The country makes a well-organized and clean impression, the people are well dressed, we see no beggars. Earlier people told us that Swaziland is more like a chaotic African country, which to our impression is not true. One still has to see with own eyes.

The Hlane Royal National Park, the largest park of the country, is only 40km away. The landscape is green and huge sugar cane plantations are welcoming us. Unfortunately, it is still hot with 38C – somehow we had hoped it would be a bit cooler here.



The access to the park is an easy drive without a 4x4 track in the end which turns very bad shortly before reaching destination taking a lot of extra time. We just fit under the entrance gate, which is packed with bats during the day. The first game sightings right at the gate!

It is nice to hear that the South African Wild Card is also valid in Swaziland which means that we do not have to pay conservancy fee.



We are all alone at the big campsite and can choose freely where to set up camp. The water hole is not far in walking distance behind the camp site and is newly done and quite large. We can watch Hippos, Nyalas, Impalas and a stork.





## 4.12.2019 Hlane Royal National Park

At 4:30 a.m. our alarm goes off and we walk to water hole, hoping to see the rhinos. There is a light drizzle of rain but nevertheless, two rhinos are resting at the water hole.

We are lucky soon after more rhinos are appearing from the bush, they all have impressive long and spikey horns which we have not seen before. It's a real mud bath. The two hippos seem determined to defend their water hole against the others.



It is raining the whole day and temperatures are dropping to only 20C, that is 18C less than we had yesterday! What a sharp drop! We put on our jumpers and are happy with the cooler weather. During today's rest day we can relax in our cabin, usually it was always too hot to stay inside.

In evening we are back at the water hole, but 'of course' there is no animal in sight. The park is wet and there are lots of puddles everywhere, there is no need to venture to the water hole for a drink.

### 5.12.2019 Hlane Royal National Park

At 4:30 a.m. we again walk to the water hole, but as expected, under these wet conditions no animal shows up, not even a bird. We go back to bed, luckily it is not far, to have another nap. Also today it rains the entire day and we enjoy another day's rest.



In the late afternoon, the rain stops and we walk to the water hole where we get to see a great performance by two elephants. A very active elephant couple appears at the water hole, they throw branches around, splash in the water and it looks like from the behavior of the male that the female is in heat.

Suddenly, the elephant bull pretends to attack two other spectators and only stops shortly before the electric fence. Most guests – including us – jump a few meters back. Thereafter he stays close to fence to show "who is boss". The rangers present ask all guests to give him some space and move back from the tiny fence, which wouldn't be a real obstacle for the elephant should he really want to get through.





## 6.12.2019 Mlilwane Royal National Park

Today we want to drive to the second national park of Swaziland, the Mlilwane Royal National Park, but not before checking our water hole again. No game in sight so we decide to make a game drive before we finally leave. At the reception we are informed that the smaller side tracks are very wet and soft due to the rain and we should take care not to get stuck. Indeed, the tracks are very soft and slippery and at one point we rather turn around. On a back track we come very close to two rhinos which stay for quite a while and don't run away immediately. What a nice experience.





At the park exit is a sad display. All the snares collected by the rangers are piled up, the poachers use snares to catch game. These are traps made from strong steel wire. It is a slow agonizing death for the animals, and a never-ending fight against poaching.



Mlilwane Royal National Park is about 100 km away, but hundreds of car-destroying speed bumps as well as many construction sites along the M3 slow us down considerably. We pass through the city of Manzini and get an impression of this small country, which is very similar to South Africa.

Here in Mlilwane we meet up again with Patrick our friend from Inhassoro, who actually brought us into Swaziland. He has two mechanics with him working for three days already here in the bush to fix up his Conqueror offroad-trailer which got factory delivered with hundreds of problems. In the evening we all have together a big BBQ.



