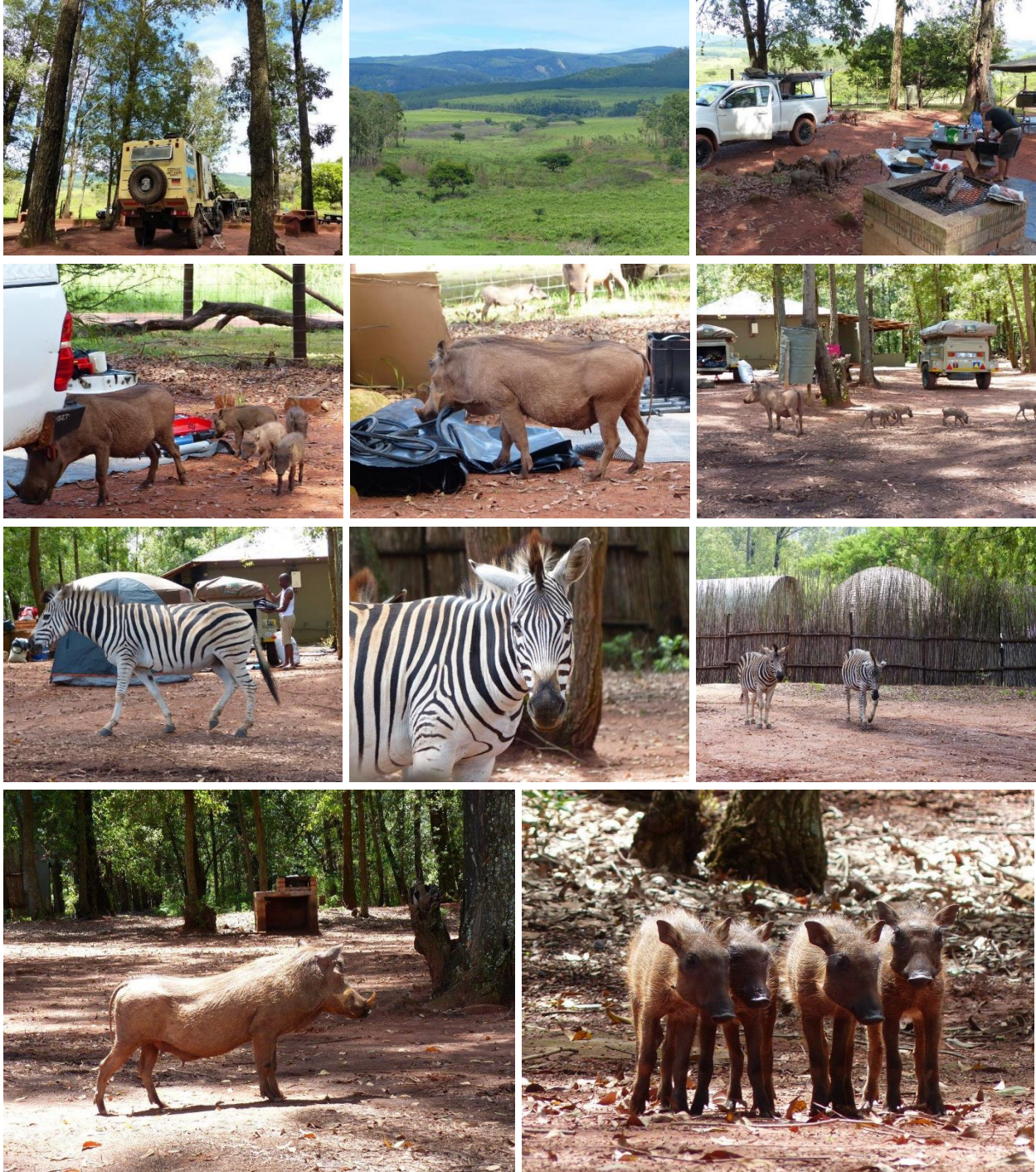


7.12.2019 Mlilwane Royal National Park

The Mlilwane Park is relatively small and not a park with native bush, as it was previously a farm. What's unique is, that the animals walk through our camp, relatively used to humans. The warthogs are checking out any food unattended, the zebras are suddenly galloping by and the nyalas are strutting quietly and carefully a bit closer. These animal encounters are a lot of fun and it's hard to stop taking photos.





The many animals visiting our camp are keeping us busy. Meanwhile the mechanics fixing Patrick's trailer have finished their job and are returning home. Actually, we planned to have one last Braai together in the evening, but the weather does not play along. The rain is getting stronger, our camp fire has no chance. Finally, we give up on the idea of a campfire. Luckily the park has a restaurant where we can escape from the rain. At least, our farewell dinner can still take place.



8.12.2019 Mlilwane Royal National Park

It is time to say good bye again to Patrick, as he is heading back to Mozambique. We will stay for another day, but unfortunately more rain is forecasted. The weather report is correct. It is raining the whole day and the rain gets worse in the evening. All we can do is taking a few short strolls around the camp. Luckily, we stay warm and dry in the Unimog.



The campsite has a few of the traditional Beehive Huts, they can be booked for accommodation. Beehive Huts are historical Swazi dwellings, made from up to 1000 saplings tightly woven and covered by grass skirts, so an enemy spear would not be able to penetrate. The floor is made from compacted cow dung and mud. These all-natural materials maintain a comfortable indoor temperature all year round.

For additional security against attackers, the entrance is always built very low. One has to crawl into the hut on all fours, therefore an attack while entering through the door wasn't that easy. However, these „hotel huts“ have been upgraded to normal rooms with a bathroom, concrete floor and higher entrance doors. Without maintenance a hut will only last 1-2 years. These days these huts are only still used in the Hhohho region.



9.12.2019 The Gables

It rained through the entire night and it just won't stop pouring down. The campsite starts to flood, it's too wet to stay outside and even no animals are passing through our camp today. Finally, we have enough battling the mud and decide to drive to the Gables Mall, just a few kilometers away. At least there is a coffee shop and we can stretch our legs a bit in the mall.



For the night we just stay on the parking lot of the mall and hope that no-one will chase us away.

10.12.2019 Lundzi Swaziland – Waverley ZA, Middelburg

Today we want to travel into South Africa and plan to use the small Lundzi border crossing, in the hope that the immigration officers are a bit friendlier and more relaxed there. We have heard that lately when crossing into South Africa via a land border only a 30-Day-Visa is granted, instead of the usual 90 days. Actually, we are entitled to a 90 day visa, but they do not want to always give it. Wouldn't it be more logic to let tourists stay in a country as long as possible, because usually we just spend money and hence support the local economy...



After the heavy rainfalls the last 25km to the Lundzi border post have turned into a big mud track. It's hard to believe, that this track is leading to an official border post. Normal cars without 4x4 would have real trouble reaching this border. There are also no sign posts to the border crossing at all and at one point we are so unsure whether we are on the right track, that we stop another car and ask for the way to the border crossing to South Africa.



The departure from Swaziland is swift, a form has to be filled out, our passports get stamped and off we are. As we are still in the South African customs union, we do not have to get our Carnet stamped anymore.

The South Africans are as expected much stricter, even at this tiny border crossing. We have to convince the immigration officer with all our charm that we need a 90-Day-Visa, which we luckily receive. Afterwards, the customs officers are doing a thorough job checking our cabin as well as the drivers cab, no-one is smiling, all straight faces. At other borders we were even joking with the customs officers. They look into every hatch and drawer and even open some of our Tupperware boxes, a toiletry bag and the ash tray in the driver's cabin! We are wondering what they are looking for... maybe drugs? They ask us several times if we carry any weapons until they are satisfied and finally let us pass. On the South African side the mud track turns into in a nice tar road!

The next bigger city is Middelburg, we drive directly to the Middelburg Mall, which is unexpectedly huge, to buy a new local SIM card. In the Vodacom shop, they do not want to sell us a SIM card, because of load shedding (power cuts to save energy). The sales lady could not really explain what load shedding had to do with buying a new SIM card, but she stayed firm not to sell us one. Therefore, we walk over to the competition, the MTN shop is just opposite, where the guy sells us a SIM card without any hesitation. Just in the middle of the registration process the power goes off due to load shedding. The staff immediately lock the door, our registration was cut short and everybody just goes home as it is 5:00pm already and the entire Mall goes dark. The big super markets

have standby generators, but all other shops close and the staff goes home. What a surreal experience to be in a huge dark shopping mall without power.

We camp at the Steve Tshwete Communal Campsite right at the Middelburg Dam, but due to the bad weather we can hardly see anything of our surroundings.



11.12.2019 Pretoria

Due to the bad weather the “Mog Doc” in Pretoria had to postpone their company Christmas outing, so we were able to visit them already today. One wheel-gear on the back-portal axle is losing oil and we should better have it repaired. Since we are now close to one of the few Unimog specialists in the country, we take the opportunity to get this fixed now.

After one week of rain the sun is shining again, but all is still wet and there are still some flooded rivers and roads. In Bronkhorstspruit the main road was closed, because the river flooded the bridge. But we are lucky, the bridge reopened to traffic as we arrive and the police let us pass through.

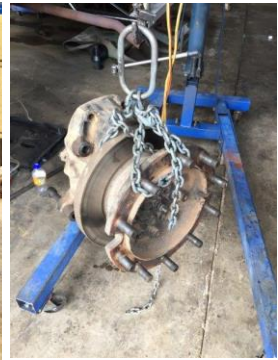


Pretoria (renamed to Tshwane) is one of the three capitals of South Africa, located 60 km north of Johannesburg. The executive authority (government and administration) is located here. The town is quieter and of course much smaller than Johannesburg. We

notice the many trees and pretty flowers planted. As we have to cross the whole town it's like a little city tour for us, the Mog Doc workshop is located 20km west of Pretoria.



At the Mog Doc they are already awaiting us and tend to us immediately. Quickly, the wheel is taken off and the wheel hub gear case is put apart. The problem is that the wheel bearing is stuck and cannot be removed with a standard extractor. It just won't move. Later, a big thunderstorm is approaching and work has to be interrupted, the tools have to be secured in the dry shed, the wheel hub as to be packed watertight. In the end time is up and we have to camp in the workshop of Ferdie, "Mr. Mog Doc".



12.12.2019 Johannesburg

Early in the morning we continue to find a solution to extract the wheel bearing. Finally, two nuts are welded onto the old bearing to be able to screw in another extractor. This works and the wheel bearing is coming out slowly. The seal which prevents oil from the wheel hub gears getting into the axle casing is integrated into the wheel bearing itself. Which means that we have to change the whole wheel bearing instead of just the seal...

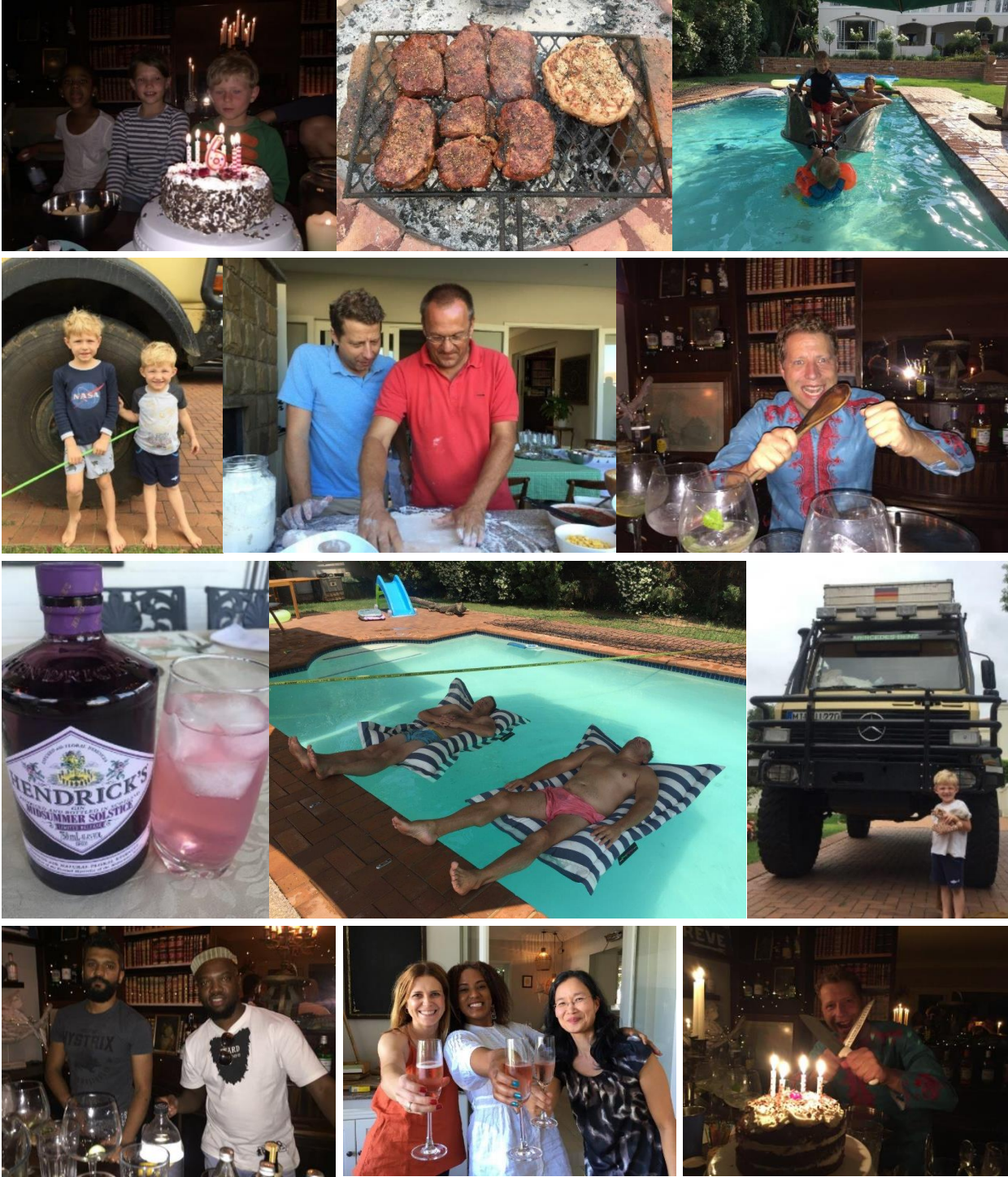
We are the last client and today is also the last working day of the year for the MogDoc team. Therefore they have a little workshop braai, to which we are kindly invited.

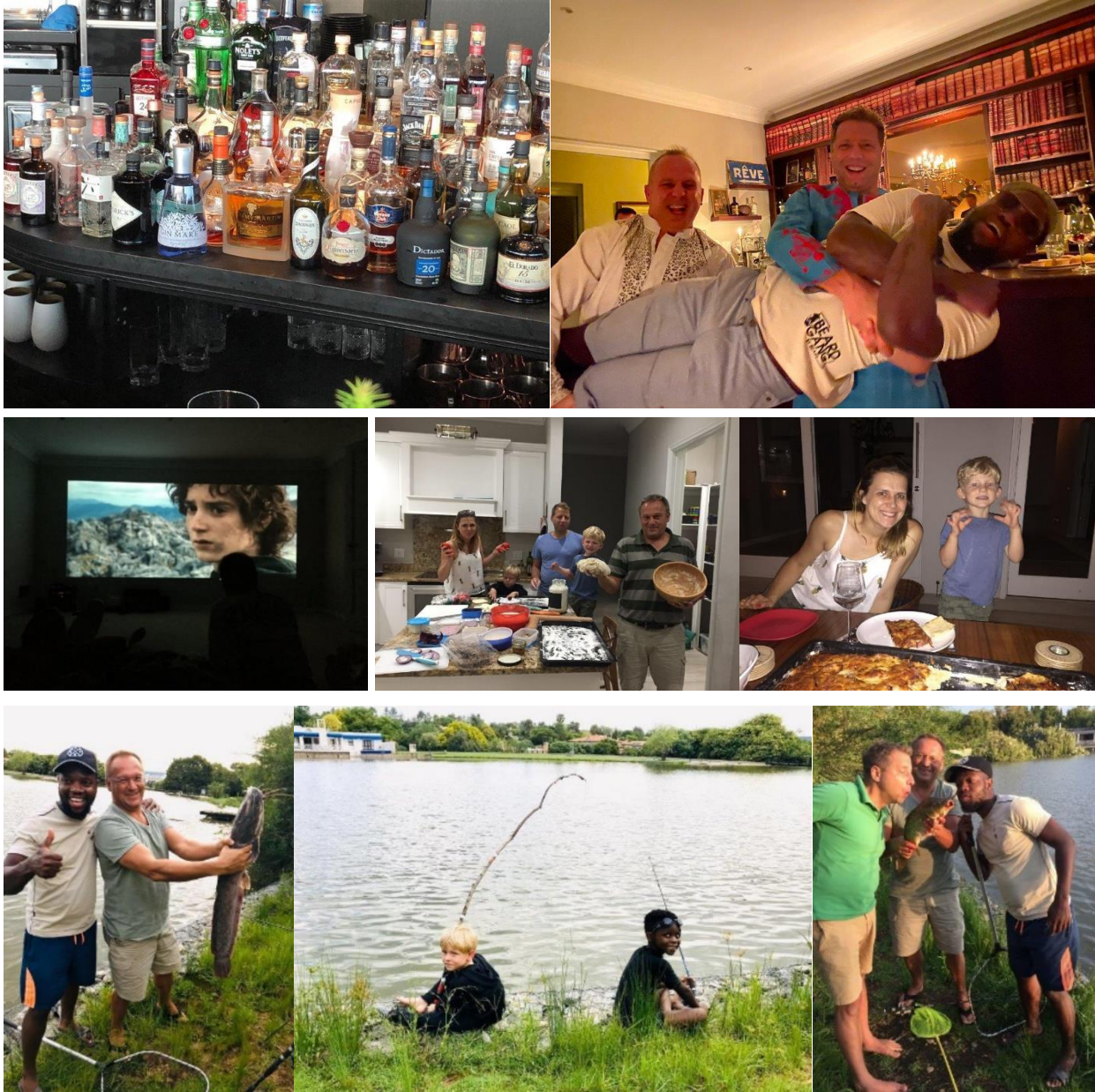


Finally, we are on our way to Johannesburg to visit Jacqueline and Schnack. We are really looking forward to spent the holidays with them and their two sons



We have a great time, during this festive season there is always a reason party, to invite for a BBQ or to get invited to another BBQ. Also, several birthdays happen to be in December and there is of course Christmas and New year to be celebrated. There is never a dull moment, the days are short, time is flying, we have a lot of fun.





3.1.2020 Middelburg

One should leave on a high note... We stick to the rule, although it is very hard to say good bye. Dear Jacqueline and Schnack, Eric and Oki, thank you so much for your great hospitality. We had a great time!

We want to visit the Kruger Nationalpark one more time before we head towards the coast. Today we manage to still drive to Middelburg and arrive just before dark back at the Steve Tschwete Communal Camp.